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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Third periodic reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Addendum

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC *

[22 March 1999]

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* The second periodic report concerning rights covered by articles 1 to 15 (E/1990/6/Add.1) was considered by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its sixth session (see E/C.12/1991/SR.7, 9 and 11) in 1991.

Articles 6 and 7

1. The Syrian Arab Republic has been a member of the International Labour Organization since 1947 and, by 31 December 1997, had ratified 46 international labour conventions, including the following:

- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958, ratified under the terms of Decree No. 498 of 1960 promulgated by the President of the Syrian Arab Republic;

- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention (No. 131), 1970, ratified by Decree No. 256 of 23 March 1972;

- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951, ratified by Act No. 371 of 23 March 1972;

- Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention (No. 14), 1921, ratified by Presidential Decree No. 498 of 1960;

- Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention (No. 106), 1957, ratified by Act No. 1284 of 6 October 1958;

- Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81), 1947, ratified by Presidential Decree No. 944 of 1960;

- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention (No. 129), 1969, ratified by Decree No. 247 of 23 March 1972.

2. The Syrian Government has also acceded to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

3. The Syrian Arab Republic submits annual periodic reports to the International Labour Organization/International Labour Office/Standards Department and to the Regional Office for Arab States at Beirut on the conventions to which it has acceded. These reports are either detailed or in simplified form, as requested by the International Labour Office (Committee of Experts).

4. The recent reports submitted to the International Labour Office/Standards Department include the report dated 15 August 1998 on the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), the August 1998 report on the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention (No. 129) and the report dated 30 August 1998 on the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29).

5. Reference must also be made to the fact that the Syrian Government submits reports on employment policy and on the Human Resources Development Convention (No. 142) of 1975 even though it has not ratified the latter.

6. The labour and unemployment situation and trends are illustrated by the following tables:

Proportional distribution of the labour force by gender and occupational branch in 1995

Occupational branch	Male	Female	Total
Arts and crafts	8.7%	21.8%	11.2%
Administrative and secretarial	8.6%	5.8%	8.3%
Sales	18.8%	1.3%	10.7%
Services	6.1%	2.3%	5.3%
Agriculture	20.7%	60.4%	28.8%
Manufacturing	37.1%	8.4%	35.7%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Proportional distribution of persons with a secondary occupation in 1995

Principal occupation	Proportion with a secondary occupation		
	Male	Female	Total
Arts and crafts	1.8%	1.1%	1.6%
Administrative and secretarial	0.5%		0.4%
Sales	2.9%	1.4%	2.9%
Services	0.5%	0.8%	0.5%
Agriculture	15.8%	3.0%	10.3%
Manufacturing	1.1%		1.0%
TOTAL	4.3%	2.0%	4.0%

Distribution of labour force in Syria by gender in the years 1990 and 1996

Year	Male	Female	Total
1990	2 725	615	3 340
1996	3 433	990	4 423

Distribution of the labour force in Syria by gender in the years 1990 and 1996 (in thousands)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1990	2 725	615	3 340
1996	3 433	990	4 423

Percentage distribution of the labour force in Syria by economic activity and gender in the years 1990 and 1996

Economic activity	1990			1996		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	22.9	53.7	28.4	20.8	59.9	28.6
Mining	0.2	-	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.4
Manufacturing	15.6	6.6	14.3	17.8	7.9	15.8
Electricity, gas and water	0.3	0.1	0.3	1.3	0.4	1.1
Construction	12.5	1.2	10.8	15.5	1.2	12.6
Trade	13.6	1.8	10.3	16.8	3.5	13.8
Transport, communications and storage	5.9	1.6	5.2	6.2	1.1	5.2
Finance, insurance and real estate	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.4	0.4	1.4
Community and personal services	28.2	34.2	29.7	19.8	25.5	21.1
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100

Ratio of labour force to total population (%)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1990	44.0	10.4	27.6
1996	45.9	13.9	30.2

Source: Estimates based on:

1. Labour supply survey of 1995.
2. Labour study of 1990.

Percentage of total labour force unemployed in 1995

Gender	Urban	Rural	Total
Male	5.6	5.2	5.7
Female	22.6	6.9	12.6
TOTAL	8.2	5.7	7.0

7. The policies and measures that have been adopted with a view to ensuring the availability of work for every individual prepared to engage therein are being implemented in two ways: (a) through competition or selection (art. 8 of Act No. 1/1985); (b) through the employment offices that have been established in the administrative centres of all the governorates in accordance with the Labour Act (these employment offices register the names of unemployed persons and first-time entrants into the labour market and subsequently nominate them for employment in institutions and enterprises that are subject to the employment regulations).

8. In accordance with Decree No. 1470 of 1978, the Directorate of Manpower at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the employment offices in the governorates carry out studies and surveys of the various problems affecting the utilization of human resources and impeding achievement of the full and optimum employment of the labour force in the various branches of the national economy.

9. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour comprises a Research and Training Directorate which organizes training courses for new appointees as well as further on-the-job training.

10. The Ministry of Industry has a vocational training centre at which first-time entrants into the labour market are provided with training and the requisite professional and technical diplomas in specific occupations. Most of the Government Ministries also operate specialized technical and vocational institutes at which their employees receive training in their particular fields of activity, such as health, finance, higher education, education, tourism and culture, etc.

Guidance and training

11. Human resources constitute the real wealth of every society and nation and of mankind as a whole and, consequently, must be carefully nurtured in order to enable them to achieve their intellectual aspirations and master the skills conducive to their development.

12. The Syrian Arab Republic is therefore aware of the importance of guidance and training, for which all the ministries and public-sector institutions are showing increasing concern, illustrated by the establishment of vocational and specialized training centres and management and productivity development centres. Guidance and training programmes are also organized to meet the quantitative and qualitative socio-economic development requirements in various fields of academic and technical expertise. The overall aim of these programmes is as follows:

(a) To provide workers with technical and specialized training and appropriate skills in order to help them to improve their standard of performance;

(b) To expand and improve their knowledge and experience in the field of public functions;

(c) To provide workers with the necessary skills and help them to use modern technologies;

13. To achieve these aims, article 18 of the Basic Act No. 1 of 1985 concerning State employees stipulates that public bodies have an obligation to train their employees in accordance with their statutes. Pursuant to that Act, Decree No. 3803 of 20 November 1985 promulgated model statutes, articles 25-33 of which defined the aims, principles and fundamental requirements of the vocational guidance and training system. In conformity with those model statutes, public bodies have established guidance and training directorates within their organizational structure and have formulated guidance and training plans for their employees. The number, duration and nature of these guidance and training programmes in and outside the country differ in accordance with the respective needs, fields of specialization and functions of the various ministries and public bodies, although their overall aim is to provide their employees with scientific, practical, vocational, cultural and technical skills. It is noteworthy that the findings of the labour market survey conducted in 1995 showed that only 60 per cent of employees had attended t least one training course and, of those, 60 per cent had completed training courses lasting less than 15 weeks and 64 per cent had completed courses in technical and production-related occupations. The findings of the survey also showed that 74 per cent of them had attended one training course, 66.5 per cent had attended two courses and the remainder had attended three or more courses.

14. With regard to future training needs, the findings of the survey showed that 21 per cent of the institutions needed employee training (90 per cent in-house and 10 per cent external).

15. Popular organizations also prepare training programmes for their employees and for the categories which they serve (women, peasants, workers and young persons) in order to enable them to earn a living and contribute to the socio-economic development process.

16. The private sector plays an important role in the field of guidance and training. Recent years have witnessed the establishment of private training centres, some of which are licensed by the Ministry of Education while others are licensed by the General Federation of Craftsmen.

17. The number of centres licensed by the Ministry of Education to operate in the various Syrian governorates amounts to 140, of which 97 teach languages, 37 provide computer training and 6 provide vocational training.

18. The number of training centres licensed by the General Federation of Craftsmen to operate in most parts of the country amounts to 106. These provide training in computer science, electronics, electrical and mechanical engineering, vehicle mechanics, refrigeration and air-conditioning, accountancy and business administration, typing, video and television, hairdressing, cosmetics, tailoring, fashion design and dressmaking.

19. Some charitable associations also engage in adult education activities in which they organize vocational training courses to teach women and girls various handicraft and computer skills with a view to improving their socio-economic conditions.

20. In addition, educational and vocational training activities are undertaken for the benefit of various categories of disabled and elderly persons and prisoners with a view to promoting their social reintegration and enabling them to contribute to the socio-economic development process.

21. The aim of achieving full employment through the elimination of unemployment is being impeded by various difficulties, and particularly by the circumstances of the Israeli occupation from 1948 to date which has obliged Syria to remain in a state of alert and, consequently, to allocate a large part of its resources to national defence in the face of the Israeli enemy. As a result, Syria has not been able to devote its full resources to development and to the provision of appropriate employment opportunities for all persons who are able and willing to work, nor has it been able to achieve full employment of its labour force and finally eliminate unemployment even though the State has always endeavoured, through its plans, to achieve that goal.

22. The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was promulgated in 1973, guarantees basic human rights by, for example, recognizing personal freedom as a sacred right of all citizens, whom it also regards as equal before the law in regard to their rights and obligations.

23. There are no discriminatory distinctions, exceptions, restrictions or preferences in law, administrative practice or everyday relations between persons or groups. Syrian society is distinguished from other societies by its tolerance and lack of bigotry. The phenomenon of discrimination is alien to Syrian society, in which it has never existed. Accordingly, in Syria, there is no basis for any discrimination, exception, restriction or preference on grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin that would in any way hamper or impede the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social or cultural fields, in employment or in any other sphere of public life.

24. In spite of the fact that no form of discrimination has ever existed in Syrian society, and even though the law does not contain a single provision that permits discrimination, the Syrian legislature has taken preventive measures. For example, article 307 of the Syrian Penal Code promulgated in 1949 prescribes penalties for any act or written or oral communication that provokes, or is intended to provoke, confessional or racial bigotry or strife among the various communities and component elements of the nation. Article 308 of the said Code also prescribes penalties for anyone belonging to an association established for the purposes specified in article 307 above. Articles 69 and 109 of the Penal Code make provision for the dissolution of such associations and the confiscation of their assets. No subsequent legislation has been promulgated in this regard because there has been no need therefor.

25. With regard to the methods used to fix wages, the latter should be subject to the principle of contractual freedom and should be determined by agreement between the contracting parties. However, in order to protect workers from employers who might attempt to impose harsh wage conditions or who might fail to pay workers a wage sufficient to meet their basic needs, the State has felt obliged to intervene in order to improve the living standards of workers and, consequently, contractual freedom is no longer absolute in the field of employment since the State has begun to intervene in order to protect workers, particularly in regard to wages.

26. Numerous methods have been used to fix wages. The method applied in the Syrian Arab Republic is to specify a minimum wage for all persons working in a given occupation.

27. The minimum wage system was introduced when the previous Labour Act No. 279 was promulgated in 1946 and the system continued to be applied until the promulgation of the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959, articles 156, 157, 158 and 159 of which made provision for the establishment of minimum wage-fixing committees in each of the country's governorates. Each of these minimum wage-fixing committees consists of representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade or the Ministry of Industry (depending on whether the occupation in which wages are to be fixed is commercial or industrial), as well as a representative of the employers and a representative of the trade unions, who propose minimum wages for every commercial and industrial occupation. These committees discharge their tasks in accordance with the wage-fixing principles and instructions issued by the Ministry, which can be summarized as follows:

(a) The minimum wage-fixing committee must divide the persons working in the private-sector occupation concerned into categories based on their degree of responsibility and the importance and requirements of their work, ranging from managerial, specialized and technical functions to simple and ordinary tasks, and must draw up a job description for each category.

(b) The committee must study the current situation in the occupation and must ensure that its proposals are consistent with the wage-fixing decisions taken in regard to workers engaged in the same occupation in other governorates. Due regard must also be paid to the need for consistency in classification, nomenclature, terminology and definitions and the committee's minimum wage proposals must be based on those to which an average skilled and competent worker is entitled, without gender-based discrimination, in accordance with the principle of equal pay for equal work and the need to ensure that the wage is sufficient to meet the worker's basic needs. The committee must take into consideration the views of the employers and of the workers or their competent organizations.

28. In accordance with article 158 of the Labour Act, the committee reviews its proposals, which are ratified by the Ministry under the terms of a ministerial ordinance, one year after their promulgation.

29. The minimum wage-fixing committee must observe the principle of an overall minimum wage payable to an ordinary non-apprentice worker in the country. The wage scale is therefore based on an evaluation of the job and the extent of responsibility associated therewith, in accordance with the instructions and the wage principles to be followed, the committee being empowered to increase minimum wages by 4 per cent per year.

30. Minimum wages have the force of law insofar as, under the terms of article 228 of the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959, any violation thereof renders the offender liable to a fine of 50-500 Syrian pounds. Moreover, under the provisions of article 159 of the Act, concerning wage fixing, the court may also order the offender to pay the arrears due in respect of wages and allowances. Each fine is multiplied by the number of workers against whom the offence was committed.

31. With regard to the average and minimum wages 10 years ago, 5 years ago and at the present time, the following should be noted.

32. Ten years ago, in 1988, the overall minimum wage for workers at the lowest grade in the private and mixed sectors who were subject to the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959 stood at around LS 950 per month (LS 1,375 in the administrative centres of the governorates). By 1993, the minimum wage for the same workers had increased to LS 1,490 in the administrative centres and LS 1,375 outside those centres. At the present time, the overall minimum wage for those categories of workers stands at LS 1,940 in the administrative centres of the governorates and LS 1,790 outside those centres.

33. Syrian legislation makes no distinction in regard to wages between men and women or between citizens and foreigners. There must be equal pay for equal work, the wage being linked to productivity. Under the terms of Act No. 6 of 1987, wages were increased and a committee was established at the Office of the Prime Minister to establish a balance between wages and prices. Although the minimum wage must be sufficient to meet the worker's basic needs, actual wages are usually higher than the minimum since they are also governed by other factors such as the worker's competence and his length of service with his employer or public institution.

34. In spite of all the difficulties from which the national economy is suffering due to the circumstances of the ongoing Israeli aggression and the worldwide economic crisis, we can affirm that wage levels in Syria enable workers and their families to enjoy a decent life, bearing in mind the fact that the Government subsidizes many consumer commodities, which citizens can therefore buy at lower prices. Moreover, education is free at all levels and the Government operates a health insurance scheme and a large network of hospitals and clinics. In addition, the cost of medicines, transport and clothing is lower than in neighbouring countries.

35. With regard to occupational safety, every employer or his representative must inform the worker, before his entry into service, of the occupational hazards and ways to guard against them (art. 107 of Act No. 91 of 1959). The employer must also take the necessary precautions to protect workers, while on duty, from occupational health hazards and dangers posed by machinery. The employer is not allowed to charge workers, or deduct from their wages, any amount in respect of the provision of that protection (art. 108 of Act No. 91 of 1959). The Minister of Social Affairs and Labour promulgated Ordinance No. 1112/1973 concerning the protection of workers from the hazards of harmful radiation.

36. The industrial accident provisions contained in article 53, paragraph (a), of the Social Insurance Act No. 92/1959 apply to industrial accidents and occupational diseases from which workers covered by the Act might suffer.

37. With regard to the legal specification of working hours, rest periods and working conditions, under the terms of the Basic Act governing State employees, the Prime Minister promulgated a decree setting actual working hours at a minimum of six and a maximum of eight hours per day. All workers are also entitled to a minimum of one day's rest with pay every week (art. 43, para. 3) in addition to public holidays with pay. Public bodies have an obligation to grant each of their employees a period of annual leave ranging from 15 to 30 days depending on their length of service. During each year of service, the employee also has the right to be absent, for health reasons, for a period of 100 days during which he receives 80 per cent of his wage for the first 30 days and his full wage for the next 70 days (art. 48, para. 1).

38. A worker has the right to absent himself for a period of one week on full pay when he marries and for a period of five consecutive days in the event of the death of one of his ascendants or descendants, his spouse, his brother or his sister. These periods of absence are not deducted from his annual leave (art. 55). A worker may also be granted, at his written request and for reasons acceptable to the public body for which he works, special leave without pay for a total period or periods not exceeding four years during his period of service (art. 57). If such leave exceeds three months, it is not counted as part of his period of service (art. 58 (b)).

39. The working hours of full-time agricultural labourers are set at 2,700 hours distributed over 300 working days per year and their weekly working hours must not exceed 60 hours. The working hours of seasonal agricultural labourers are set at 54 hours per week. Agricultural labourers are entitled to one hour's rest if their daily working hours exceed six hours (art. 103 of the Agricultural Relations Regulatory Act). All categories of workers must also be given a weekly rest period of not less than 24 consecutive hours (art. 105), although there is no stipulation to the effect that this period must be with pay. Agricultural labourers who have been in the service of their employer for an uninterrupted period of 10 months or more are entitled to two weeks' annual leave on full pay (art. 107) which can be accumulated over a period of two years (art. 111). Workers are not required to work on their major annual religious holidays, provided that the number of such holidays with pay does not exceed seven per year (art. 6). Agricultural labourers who have been in the service of their employer for not less than six months are entitled to sick leave for one month on full pay and for one month without pay if their sickness is neither of an occupational nature nor the result of an industrial accident.

40. Bills of law have been proposed to harmonize the provisions of the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959, the Agricultural Relations Regulatory Act No. 134 of 1958, the Agrarian Act No. 21 of 1974 and Legislative Decree No. 205 of 1969, concerning the regulation of crafts in the Syrian Arab Republic, with Arab and international labour conventions. These bills have been approved by the Office of the Prime Minister and have been submitted to the country's leadership for completion of the procedures for their promulgation.

41. International assistance takes the form of the provision of advice or proposals for the amendment of any of our legislative provisions that conflict with the provisions of international labour conventions in order to encourage us to ratify the largest possible number of those conventions (even though ratification is not obligatory for States members of the International Labour Organization) with a view to eliminating all forms of discrimination in employment and recruitment, improving labour legislation and labour relations, protecting workers by ensuring safe and humane working conditions, and reforming the social security systems through international labour conventions promulgated by that Organization.

Article 8

42. In Syria, the right to form trade unions was first recognized in Legislative Decree No. 152 of 18 September 1935 concerning trade unions for the liberal professions and crafts. The General Federation of Trade Unions, which is a non-governmental trade-union organization, was established on 18 March 1938.

43. It should be noted that Syria has been a member of the International Labour Organization since 1947 and, by 31 December 1997, had ratified 46 international labour conventions, including the following:

(a) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (No. 87), 1948;

(b) Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98), 1949.

44. With regard to the conditions governing the establishment of trade unions, or membership thereof, we wish to point out that, under the terms of the Trade Union Regulatory Act, trade union activities are voluntary and a worker is free to join the union established for the occupation in which he is engaging at any location whatsoever. He is absolutely free, but is not compelled, to join the union representing his labour sector or occupation, regardless of his ideological, political or confessional affiliations. Membership of trade unions is subject to no conditions or restrictions whatsoever. The worker's choice of the union that he wishes to join is subject solely to his type of work or occupation. He is likewise free to withdraw from the union.

45. Non-Syrian Arabs working in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic have the right to join Syrian trade unions, participate in their elections and occupy senior posts therein on an equal footing with Syrian Arab workers. However, any non-Arab foreign workers are subject to the condition of reciprocal treatment by the States whose nationality they hold (art. 25 of the Trade Union Regulatory Act No. 84 of 1968).

46. From the procedural standpoint, a worker wishing to join a trade union is required to submit an application, together with a copy of his personal identity card, to the union's office (art. 26 of the Trade Union Regulatory Act No. 84 of 1968). The worker's membership of the union is deemed to be accepted and valid from the date of payment of his membership fee and his first monthly subscription (art. 27 of the above-mentioned Act), which is a small nominal amount. In accordance with article 23, a worker must be over 15 years of age before he can join a trade union and he is not permitted to join more than one union.

47. With regard to the conditions governing the formation of trade unions, article 2 of the Trade Union Regulatory Act No. 84 of 1968 stipulates that: "Any group of workers, regardless of their number, may form a trade-union committee". Article 3 stipulates that: "The trade-union committees in each occupation have the right to form a trade union enjoying corporate personality in any governorate". It should be noted that the Act lays down the following conditions for the formation of a trade-union committee by a group of workers:

(a) The name of the trade-union committee must be added to the list of trade-union committees in the governorate under the terms of a decision taken by the Council of the General Federation of Trade Unions on the basis of a proposal by the labour federation in the governorate and the trade union;

(b) The definition of "group of workers", as set forth in the Act, must apply to the group wishing to form a trade-union committee.

48. Paragraph 4 of Legislative Decree No. 84 defines "group of workers" as follows:

"(a) All the workers working in the governorate in a single factory or workshop, a single institution or facility, a single administration or department or a municipality;

"(b) All the workers working for a single employer in the governorate, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph (a);

"(c) All the workers working in an occupational branch in the governorate in which the trade-union committee is to be established, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph (a)."

49. The country's General Federation of Trade Unions is a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the country's occupational federations are affiliated to the corresponding Arab and international occupational federations.

50. The country's trade unions discharge their functions and responsibilities in full freedom and adopt decisions consistent with those of the Congress of the General Federation of Trade Unions, the highest constitutional body, which meets every five years and is empowered to consider any matter of concern to the working class with a view to achieving the aims of the General Federation. Its functions include consideration and approval of the General Federation's rules of procedure, approval of its annual and overall plans of action, evaluation of the work of the trade unions during the preceding year, approval of the final balance sheets of the trade unions and establishment of the financial budget for the coming year. Its departments operate in accordance with the rules and procedures set forth in the provisions of the Trade Union Regulatory Act and the exercise of trade-union rights by the departments is controlled by the judiciary.

51. The following measures have been taken to consolidate the principle of free collective equality.

(a) The principle of the appointment of trade-union leaders has been abolished in favour of electoral processes at all trade-union organizational levels;

(b) Clearly defined rules have been laid down for the formation of trade-union committees by groups of workers working for a single employer;

(c) The trade-union movement is being encouraged through confidence-building measures and its trade-union organizations are being strengthened so that the working class can form a cohesive unit.

52. With regard to the organizational structure of the country's trade unions, the trade-union committee, consisting of five members, in a workshop or facility is the smallest trade-union body. All the trade-union committees in a specific labour sector in a governorate elect the trade union's executive, consisting of 5-9 members. The trade union represents the workers in a single occupational sector at the governorate level and the country as a whole has 194 trade unions distributed among its 13 governorates. The trade unions are represented by 2,459 grass-roots trade-union committees which, in turn, represent all the 814,540 trade-union members in the public, private and mixed sectors. The

seven-member executives of the occupational federations are elected. The country has eight such occupational federations, which represent the workers in all occupations and in all sectors. These are:

(a) The Occupational Federation of Textile Workers' Unions;

(b) The Occupational Federation of Public Service Workers' Unions;

(c) The Occupational Federation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Unions;

(d) The Occupational Federation of Construction and Woodworkers' Unions;

(e) The Occupational Federation of Transport Workers' Unions;

(f) The Occupational Federation of Printing, Cultural and Information Workers' Unions;

(g) The Occupational Federation of Metallurgical and Electrical Industry Workers' Unions;

(h) The Occupational Federation of Food Industry Workers' Unions.

53. The Trade Union Congress, which is the highest constitutional body, consists of all the delegates of the trade unions and occupational federations, the number of whom is in proportion to the total membership of each trade union and occupational federation. The Congress, in turn, elects the 75-member Council of the General Federation, which is the General Federation's governing body. The Trade Union Regulatory Act defines the powers of the Council which elects the Executive of the General Federation which, by law, consists of 11 full-time members.

54. The State has avoided the need for workers to resort to strike action by adopting a policy of joint (collective) employment contracts and organizing conciliation and arbitration panels and procedures to settle any collective disputes that arise between workers and their employers.

55. Articles 89-106 of section 2, chapter II, of the Labour Act regulate the joint contract of employment, which is an agreement governing conditions of employment concluded between one or more trade unions and the employers employing workers belonging to those unions or the organizations representing the employers. Articles 188-210 of chapter V of the Labour Act regulate the conciliation and arbitration procedures for the settlement of labour disputes, which takes place in two stages. The first stage consists in conciliation and the second stage consists in arbitration. In accordance with article 209 of the Labour Act, workers are forbidden to strike or to partly or wholly withhold their labour when an application has been made for conciliation and during the course of the procedures before the competent administrative authority or the conciliation or arbitration panel.

56. Employers are not permitted to halt their operations, wholly or in part, unless they are obliged to do so for valid reasons, in which case they must apply, by registered mail, for the approval of the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour. The decision on such applications is taken by the Minister.

57. Under the terms of article 65 of the Basic Act concerning State employees, it is prohibited for workers to participate in the organization of meetings at their place of work in violation of the provisions of the laws in force. They are not permitted to abandon, suspend or obstruct the work with a view to disrupting order or halting or impeding production, nor are they permitted to incite other workers to do so.

58. The provisions of Act No. 84 of 1968 and the amendments thereto which entered into force before 1990 specify and guarantee the overall rights of trade unions and trade-unionists. No further amendments have been made to those provisions since that year.

Article 9

59. In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the State guarantees social security for workers and undertakes to provide for every citizen and his family in the event of accident, sickness, disability, orphanhood or old age. The State also protects the health of its citizens and provides them with preventive, therapeutic and medicative facilities (art. 46 of the Constitution).

60. All citizens have access to free health services at the health centres and hospitals run by the State and by popular organizations, associations and institutions operating in the field of social development. The Syrian Arab Republic has also ratified the Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention (No. 118), 1962. Victims of accidents are entitled to medical care under the terms of the Social Insurance Act No. 92 of 1959, article 24 of which stipulates as follows:

> "Every victim of an accident, or his beneficiaries after his death, have the right to claim compensation in respect of the accident from the Social Insurance Authority in accordance with the rules set forth in this section. Such financial compensation shall not be payable in the following circumstances:
>
> "(a) If the injury was deliberately self-inflicted by the victim;
>
> "(b) If the injury was caused by disreputable and deliberate misconduct on the part of the victim. Such misconduct shall include any act committed by the victim under the influence of alcohol or narcotic drugs and any flagrant violation of the safety instructions posted in prominent locations at the place of work."

61. This does not apply if the accident leads to the death of the insured person or leaves him afflicted with a permanent disability exceeding 25 per cent of total disability (art. 32).

62. The circumstances referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) cannot be invoked unless proved by an investigation conducted in accordance with article 42.

63. Under the terms of article 25: "The Authority shall be responsible for the victim's treatment until he recovers from his injury or is certified to be disabled."

64. Article 63 of section 2 of the Labour Act, concerning individual contracts of employment, regulates the wage-related aspect of medical care by stipulating that a worker who is certified as sick is entitled to 70 per cent of his wage during the first 90 days, rising to 80 per cent during the next 90 days, in any one year.

65. Article 65 of the Labour Act places employers under an obligation to provide medical care by stipulating that:

> "The employer must provide his workers with first-aid facilities on his premises and, if he employs more than 100 workers in a single location or town or within a radius of 15 kilometres, he must engage a qualified nurse to provide the said first-aid facilities and, in addition, must appoint a physician to examine and treat his workers at a place designated for that purpose and must also supply them with the medicines needed for their treatment, all this being free of charge.
>
> "If the number of workers employed in the above-mentioned manner exceeds 500, he must also provide them, free of charge, with all other facilities needed for their treatment, including access to the services of medical specialists to perform surgical and other operations and supply of the requisite medicines.
>
> "If the worker is treated at a government or charitable hospital in the circumstances referred to in the two preceding paragraphs, the employer has an obligation to pay the costs of the accommodation, treatment and medicines to the hospital administration.
>
> "The costs of the accommodation, treatment and medicines referred to in the preceding paragraph and elsewhere above shall be determined in accordance with the methods and principles laid down in an ordinance promulgated by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour in agreement with the Minister of Health."

66. Pursuant to article 65, Ordinance No. 539 of 1961 was promulgated and subsequently amended by Ordinances Nos. 820 of 1961, 256 of 1965, 26 of 1969 and 302 of 1969, under which an employer employing from 20 to 100 workers is obliged to provide, on his premises, a first-aid station for his sick or injured employees, as well as stocks of materials and medicines. He must provide a first-aid kit (art. 2) and appoint a responsible person to administer first-aid to injured persons at any time during working hours (art. 3). He must employ a nurse if the number of his workers exceeds 100 (art. 8) and a physician if their number exceeds 500. Article 8, paragraph (e), further stipulates that the employer must bear the accommodation expenses of any sick worker whom he sends to another town for treatment not necessitating admission to hospital. Such accommodation expenses are determined in accordance with the provisions of the enterprise's internal regulations concerning reimbursement of travel costs on official business.

67. Chapter II, section 6, of the Agricultural Relations Act No. 134 of 1958 regulates health services (i.e. medical care). Article 118 of the said Act stipulates as follows:

> "An employer employing 100 or more workers in a single village or centre must provide his workers with the following health services:

"(a) He shall conclude a contract with a private physician who, at the employer's expense, shall visit the workers at their place of work at least once every month in order to check their health conditions at work and at their places of residence. The said practitioner shall examine and treat sick persons and provide medical reports if needed and shall also treat members of the workers' families at reduced fees.

"(b) He shall employ, at his expense, a private nurse who shall reside in the village or place of work and provide full-time health care for the workers under the supervision of the physician. The employer shall place at the nurse's disposal the equipment and types of medicines determined by the Minister in consultation with the Minister of Health.

"(c) Sick workers shall be transported, at the employer's expense, to the physician's surgery or to a hospital, if necessary, for examination and treatment."

68. Article 117 regulates sick leave as follows:

"Agricultural labourers who have been in the service of their employer for at least six months shall be granted the following sick leave when they are afflicted with a non-occupational disease or suffer a non-industrial accident:

" (i) One month on full pay.
"(ii) One month without pay.

"These periods of leave shall be granted on the basis of a medical report issued by the employer's physician or, in his absence, by the treating physician, in which case the report of the treating physician must be certified by the regional health officer. Full-time workers who have served for less than six months shall be granted half of the above-mentioned periods of paid and unpaid sick leave provided that they remain in the service of their employer for at least three months.

"The employer shall not dismiss his workers or give them notice of dismissal during periods of sick leave."

69. The Basic Act No. 1 of 1985 concerning State employees stipulates as follows:

"Article 53 (a): The industrial accident provisions contained in the Social Insurance Act shall apply to occupational accidents and diseases suffered by employees governed by the present Act.

"Article 53 (b): Until such time as the insurance regulations are harmonized, the Social Insurance Authority shall apply those provisions to all employees governed by the present Act on the understanding that the amounts paid, under the terms of those provisions, to employees who are not covered by the Social Insurance Act shall be charged against the budget of the public body concerned."

70. Articles 48-52 regulate sick leave, its duration, the wage to which a sick employee is entitled during his sickness and the procedure for referring the employee to the competent branch of the Medical Board.

71. This clearly indicates that medical care is provided for in the above-mentioned Basic Act concerning State employees.

72. Compensation for accidents is regulated by the Social Insurance Act No. 92 of 1959, which stipulates as follows:

"Article 25: The Authority shall be responsible for the victim's treatment until he recovers from his injury or is certified to be disabled.

"Article 26: The degree of disability resulting from the accident shall be assessed at the time of its certification, or one year after the date of occurrence of the accident in the absence of recovery, in a medical certificate which shall be issued by the Authority's physician and the form and content of which shall be specified by the Governing Body.

"Article 31: In the event of a permanent disability assessed at less than 35 per cent of total disability, the injured worker shall be entitled to compensation equivalent to the proportional disability multiplied by the value of the pension for total disability for five and a half years. This compensation shall be paid in a lump sum.

"Article 33: If the victim has previously suffered an industrial accident, his compensation shall be calculated in accordance with the following rules:

"1. If the total percentage disability resulting from the present and previous accidents is less than 35 per cent, the victim shall be compensated for his latest accident solely on the basis of the proportional disability resulting therefrom and his wage at the time of its occurrence.

"2. If the total percentage disability resulting from the present and previous accidents is equivalent to 35 per cent or more, he shall be compensated as follows:

"(a) If the victim received lump-sum compensation for his previous accident, his pension shall be assessed on the basis of the total percentage disability resulting from all his accidents and his wage at the time of the latest accident;

"(b) If the victim was already entitled to a disability pension, his pension shall be assessed on the basis of the total percentage disability resulting from all his accidents and his wage at the time of the latest accident, provided that the pension so determined is not less than his pension at the time of occurrence of the latest accident.

"Article 40: Whenever an accident occurs, the employer has an obligation to transport the victim to the place of treatment designated by the Authority, the costs of transport to and from the place of treatment being borne by the Authority in accordance with the regulations laid down by its Governing Body."

73. The above-mentioned Social Insurance Act makes no provision for maternity benefits. However, these are regulated in part 3, section 2, chapter VIII, of

the Basic Act concerning State employees, article 54 of which stipulates as follows:

"(a) Female employees shall be granted maternity leave on full pay for a period of 75 days, normally beginning in the ninth month of their pregnancy. This leave shall be granted in full, even if the newborn child dies.

"(b) This leave shall be granted on the basis of a duly authenticated medical certificate stating that the employee is in the ninth month of her pregnancy.

"(c) If the birth takes place in the ninth month of pregnancy but before the leave has been applied for, the mother shall be granted a period of only 60 days' leave with effect from the date of the birth.

"(d) If the birth takes place between the seventh and the ninth months, the mother shall be granted leave for a period of 75 days with effect from the date of the birth.

"(e) Pregnant employees requesting additional maternity leave shall be granted one month on 80 per cent of their pay and a further month without pay.

"(f) Breastfeeding employees shall be granted time off for an interrupted period of one hour each day while their child is under one year of age. The provisions of article 44 (d) of this Act shall not apply to that time off."

74. Article 133 of Act No. 91 of 1959, as amended by Legislative Decree No. 46 of 1968 and Legislative Decree No. 6 of 6 August 1984, stipulates as follows:

"(a) A working woman is entitled to a period of 75 days pre" and post-natal maternity leave, the post-natal portion of which must not be less than 40 days. This leave shall be granted on the basis of a duly authenticated medical certificate indicating the probable date of delivery.

"(b) If the birth takes place during the 40-day period referred to in the preceding paragraph, the worker may be granted a corresponding period of supplementary leave to be deducted from the annual leave due to her, failing which the said supplementary period shall be regarded as leave without pay."

75. Article 134, as amended by Legislative Decree No. 46 of 1968, further stipulates that:

"The employer shall pay the worker her full wage during the period of maternity leave granted to her in accordance with the preceding article provided that, at the time of commencement of such leave, she has been in the service of the employer for seven consecutive months."

76. Under the terms of article 135:

"An employer is not permitted to dismiss a worker for absenteeism during the leave provided for in article 133, nor is he permitted to dismiss her during her absence due to a medically certified sickness resulting from her pregnancy or delivery and which prevents her from returning to work. However, the total period of absence must not exceed six months."

77. According to article 136:

"If a worker absents herself from work in accordance with the provisions of article 133 and is subsequently found to have worked elsewhere, she shall forfeit her right to the wages due to her, without prejudice to the employer's right to dismiss her."

78. According to article 137:

"During the 18-month period following the date of her delivery, a worker who is breastfeeding her child shall be entitled, in addition to the statutory rest period, to two further daily periods of time off, amounting to not less than half an hour each, for that purpose. These two additional periods shall be regarded as time worked and shall not entail any reduction of wages."

79. The above-mentioned Social Insurance Act makes provision for retirement benefits in the following circumstances:

"(a) On separation from service when the insured person reaches the age of 60 after a period of not less than 15 years' pensionable service.

"(b) On resignation, if the insured person so prefers, after a period of not less than 20 years' pensionable service, provided that he has reached the age of 55. Separation from service due to the total incapacitation or death of the insured person before he reaches the age of 55 shall be deemed equivalent to such resignation."

80. Under the terms of article 58:

"The retirement pension shall be payable at the rate of 1/45th of the average monthly wage on which contributions have been made during the last two years, or the average monthly wage on which contributions have been made in any consecutive five-year period during the last 10 contributory years, whichever is the greater, for each year of insurance contributions. The maximum retirement pension shall be 75 per cent of the lowest above-mentioned monthly wage. When calculating the said monthly wage, care shall be taken to ensure that the difference between the insured person's wage at the end of the last two-year period and his wage at the beginning of that period does not exceed 15 per cent and that the difference between his wage at the end of the five-year period and his wage at the beginning of that period does not exceed 30 per cent. For purposes of the calculation of the period of insurance contributions, fractions of a year shall count as a full year."

81. Under the terms of article 59:

"If the insured person is separated from service, on reaching the age of 60, before completing the requisite contributory period for entitlement to a retirement pension, he shall receive a lump-sum benefit at the rate of 15 per cent of the annual wage on which he paid contributions during the last two years, or during the period of his insurance contributions if such period amounts to less than two years, for each year of his insurance contributions."

82. According to article 60:

"If the insured person is separated from service, before reaching the age of 60, for any of the reasons specified below, he shall be entitled to the lump-sum benefit referred to in the preceding article at the following rates:

"(a) In the event of the insured person's resignation due to her marriage or the birth of her first child, if she leaves her employment within six months from the date of the contract of marriage or within three months from the date of her delivery the benefit shall be payable at 16 per cent of the average wage referred to in the preceding paragraph.

"(b) In the event of the provisions of this Act ceasing to apply to the insured person, if the number of monthly contributions amounts to less than 240 the benefit shall be payable at the following rates:

"11 per cent if the number of monthly contributions paid amounts to less than 60.

"13 per cent if the number of monthly contributions paid amounts to at least 60 but less than 120.

"15 per cent if the number of monthly contributions paid amounts to 120 or more.

"(c) In addition to the benefit referred to in the preceding paragraphs, the insured person shall also be entitled to the emolument referred to in paragraph 2 of article 71 bis (a)."

83. Under article 61:

"If the insured person so requests, the Authority may commute his pension rights to a capital sum the amount of which shall be determined in accordance with a special schedule ... etc."

84. Under article 61 bis:

"If an insured person is dismissed by his employer for any of the reasons specified in article 76 of the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959, with the exception of those referred to in paragraphs 2-5 of that article, one quarter of his period of service with the said employer shall be deducted from his pensionable period of service, provided that the dismissal decision has become final."

85. Under article 62:

"An insured person who is unemployed for a period of more than two months may apply to the Authority for a cash advance, secured by his benefit or pension, provided that his period of insurance contributions exceeds one year. The method applied to determine the amount of such cash advances, as well as the conditions and procedures for their payment and reimbursement, shall be decided upon by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour in consultation with the Authority's Governing Body."

86. The right to social security, as recognized in article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, is provided for in article 62 of the Social Insurance Act under which disability and death benefits are payable if total disability or death occurs during the insured person's period of service or within six months from the date of his separation from service, provided that the disability or death does not result from an industrial accident and that the insured person is not over 65 years of age at the time of death or certification of the disability. For purposes of the calculation of age, fractions of a year count as a full year.

87. Under article 63:

"In order to be entitled to a total disability pension or death benefit, not less than six consecutive monthly contributions or 12 interrupted contributions must have been paid in respect of the insured person."

88. Under article 64:

"The permanent total disability pension or death benefit shall be assessed at the rate of 40 per cent of the average monthly wage on which contributions were paid during the last two years, or during any lesser contributory period, or of the retirement pension in respect of the contributory period of service plus three years, whichever is most favourable."

89. Under article 64 bis:

"(a) The insured person or his beneficiaries may be entitled, depending on their age, to an additional insurance benefit equivalent to a proportion of the annual wage on which contributions were paid during the final year, in accordance with Schedule No. 4 annexed to this Legislative Decree, in the following circumstance:

"(i) Total incapacitation of the insured person.
"(ii) Death of the insured person.

"In the event of the insured person's partial incapacitation (disability exceeding 35 per cent), only half of the additional insurance benefit shall be payable.

"(b) The insured person's entitlement to additional insurance is conditional on the following:

"(i) An additional insurance subscription application must be submitted to the Authority within a period of one year from the date of entry into force of this Legislative Decree in the case of insured persons who are already working on that date and within a period of six months in the case of insured persons whose employment begins after the date of entry into force of this Legislative Decree.

"(ii) The employer must remit the monthly contribution of 1 per cent deducted from the monthly wage of the worker who chooses to subscribe to this insurance.

"(iii) If disability or death occurs as a result of an industrial accident during the insured person's period of service, the rates specified in Schedule No. 4 annexed to this Legislative Decree shall be increased by 50 per cent.

"(c) The details to be included in the subscription application and the manner in which the monthly contributions are to be paid shall be regulated in accordance with the conditions and procedures determined by the Director-General of the Social Insurance Authority on the basis of a proposal by the Governing Body.

"(d) In the event of the insured person's death, the additional insurance benefit shall be distributed in accordance with the legal rules of inheritance."

90. Under article 65:

"The insured person may request that the report certifying him to be not fully disabled or assessing his percentage disability be reviewed in accordance with the medical arbitration provisions for industrial accident insurance."

91. Article 66:

"If the recipient of a retirement pension who is capable of working after reaching the age of 60 is employed as a worker to whom the provisions of this Act apply, this period of service shall be taken into account in his pension entitlement provided that he is not over 65 years of age.

"His pension shall be assessed at 2.5 per cent of his average monthly wage during that period, provided that the said assessment must under no circumstances amount to more than 5 per cent of the monthly wage on which his retirement pension was assessed if the total sum of his wage plus his pension does not exceed the wage that he was receiving at the time of his separation from service. If the total of those two amounts exceeds what he was receiving, his pension shall be reduced by the amount of the excess, without prejudice to the other conditions laid down in article 58."

92. Survivors' benefits form part of the right to social security, as recognized in article 9 of the International Covenant. This is regulated in article 24 of the Social Insurance Act No. 92, which stipulates that an injured

person or his beneficiaries after his death are entitled to compensation from the Authority in respect of his injury in accordance with the rules laid down in this section.

93. According to article 88 of the Social Insurance Act:

"Neither a pensioner's widow who married him after he reached the age of 60 nor the children born from that marriage shall be entitled to any pension benefits."

94. Under article 89:

"In the event of the death of the pensioner or person insured, his beneficiaries shall be entitled to pensions at the rates specified in Schedule No. 3 concerning industrial accidents and Schedule No. 3 (a) concerning retirement, disability and death. For pension purposes, the beneficiaries shall be:

"(i) The widow of the pensioner or insured person.
"(ii) His sons and brothers under 21 years of age.
"(iii) His widowed, divorced and unmarried daughters and sisters.
"(iv) His parents."

95. In order to benefit under the terms of the Schedule, brothers, sisters and parents must prove that they were dependants of the insured person during his lifetime and the mother must not be married to a person other than the father of the deceased. In the event of the death of a working mother, her children are entitled to the benefit specified in Schedule No. 3 attached thereto. In the event of the death of his spouse, a husband is entitled to the benefit specified in the said Schedule if, at the time of her death, he is afflicted with a total disability that prevents him from engaging in an occupation or gainful employment.

96. The indemnities provided for in paragraph 2 of article 71 bis and the lump-sum benefit provided for in this Act are distributed among the insured person's beneficiaries in accordance with the provisions of article 82 of the above-mentioned Labour Act.

97. Under article 90:

"The pension shall be payable:

"1. To the widow during her lifetime or until she remarries or engages in an occupation or other form of employment.

"2. To the daughters and sisters until they marry or engage in an occupation or other form of employment.

"3. To the sons and brothers over 21 years of age in the following circumstances:

"(a) If the pension beneficiaries are students at an educational institution, until they reach the age of 24.

"(b) If they are afflicted with a total disability that prevents them from earning a living, which must be certified by the Authority's physician, as long as the disability persists.

"Daughters shall recover their former pension rights if they are divorced or widowed within 10 years from the date of their marriage, without prejudice to the rights of the other beneficiaries of the pensioner."

98. Under article 92:

"The pensions due under the terms of this Act may be paid on a quarterly basis if they amount to less than 10 pounds per month."

99. Under article 97:

"The Authority shall pay to widows, sisters and daughters, at the time of their marriage, a grant equivalent to the value of their pension for six months."

100. Industrial accidents are regulated in articles 24-35 of the Social Insurance Act, to which reference has already been made.

101. Although unemployment benefits, in accordance with article 9 of the International Covenant, are provided for in the Social Insurance Act, their payment has been suspended under the terms of a legislative enactment.

102. With regard to family allowances, Act No. 43, promulgated by the President of the Republic on 28 June 1980, made provision for the payment of a retirement pension to the families of the martyrs of the country and the nation who were assassinated by, or died in clashes with or because of, the armed Muslim Brotherhood faction (arts. 1 and 2). Article 5 made provision for the payment of an indemnity of 50,000 Syrian pounds to the members of the martyrs' families, who also benefit from the family benefit provided for in Act No. 23 of 9 January 1978 in addition to each such family's entitlement to a house.

Article 10

103. The Syrian Arab Republic is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on which it has submitted its report which was considered by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on 16 January 1997.

104. The competent authorities in the Syrian Arab Republic are studying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women with a view to accession and ratification.

The family

105. All the legislation of the Syrian Arab Republic highlights the role of the family, which is appropriately defined in such a way as to facilitate a thorough study of its circumstances and the relationship patterns by which it is governed in order to identify its needs, strengthen it and promote its role in society.

Definition of the family

106. A person's family consists of his kinsfolk, i.e. all those who are linked to him by common descent (art. 36 of the Civil Code). Accordingly, prior to marriage, a natural person (male or female) forms part of the family of his or her parents.

107. The kinsfolk include brothers and sisters who have a common ascendant (father or mother), as well as the father and mother (the common ascendants) and collateral relatives.

108. The relationship may be direct, as in the case of the link between ascendants and descendants. The father is a direct relative, as are his parents and grandparents. The mother is also a direct relative, as are her parents and grandparents. Collateral relationship is the link between persons who, although of common descent, are not descended from each other (i.e. brothers, sisters and paternal and maternal uncles and aunts).

109. After marriage, a person has an independent family, consisting of himself, his spouse and his relatives, which is linked by kinship to the former family and its relatives.

110. Although the relatives of either spouse are regarded as having the same degree of kinship to the other spouse, they do not form part of his or her family since they are not direct or collateral relatives. For example, the wife's brother does not form part of the husband's family, nor does the husband's brother form part of the wife's family, although they are relatives.

111. Hence, a person's family consists of his spouse, his ascendants and descendants (i.e. his direct relatives) and his collateral relatives. His father's family includes him, his brothers and sisters and their children, and his children's families consist of his children, their spouses and their ascendants and descendants.

112. The Syrian Arab Republic shows special concern for the family, which constitutes the fundamental nucleus of society, and the State is making continuous endeavours to protect the family for the following reasons:

(a) Patriotic and national reasons, in view of its firm belief that the family is the most important and appropriate social institution for the upbringing, rearing and development of an Arab citizen who believes in his country and his nation, understands their causes and is ready to defend their rights;

(b) Social and educational reasons, since it is convinced that the family is the social entity in which all social values take root from childhood to the age of maturity;

(c) Economic reasons, since it is aware of, and appreciates, the family's role in the upbringing of the young generation and the provision of the human resources needed by a society in the course of transformation.

113. Article 44 of the Permanent Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic emphasizes the importance of the family in social life by stipulating as follows:

"The family is the nuclear unit of society and is protected by the State.

"The State shall protect and encourage marriage and endeavour to eliminate material and social impediments thereto. It shall protect mothers and children, take care of young people and create conditions conducive to the development of their talents."

114. Under the Constitution, women are guaranteed every opportunity to participate effectively in political, social, cultural and economic life through elimination of the restrictions preventing their advancement and their participation in social development.

115. The State also guarantees to provide for every citizen and his family in the event of accident, sickness, disability or orphanhood and in old age.

116. The legislation in force, including the Labour Act, the Agricultural Relations Act, the Housing Acts, the Social Insurance Act, the National Service Act and the Social Welfare Acts, comprise provisions that protect the family and its various members.

117. While the legislation reflects the legal status of the family, the services provided clearly illustrate the extent to which the legislation is applied and put into effect in such a way as to meet the various needs of the family.

118. The legislative provisions in force concerning the employment of women stipulate that women have the same rights as men without any discrimination and, in addition, enjoy some special privileges, such as the following:

(a) Women may be required to work from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. only in exceptional circumstances defined by the Minister of Labour;

(b) It is prohibited to employ women in forms of work that might endanger their health or their morals, in strenuous occupations, in mines and quarries, in smelting furnaces and in the manufacture of explosives, etc."

(c) Pregnant workers are granted maternity leave of 75 days on full pay, one month at 80 per cent of their pay and one month without pay;

(d) After childbirth, women are granted a one-hour break every day, in order to breastfeed their child, for a period of one and a half years from their date of delivery

119. Under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 4 of 1972, women are entitled to a family allowance for their children if they are widowed or divorced or if their husband does not receive a family allowance for their children.

120. It should be noted that the Syrian Arab Republic has ratified 46 International Labour Conventions, some of which contain provisions concerning the employment of women.

121. Agricultural relations are governed by the Agricultural Relations Regulatory Act No. 134 of 1958, as amended, article 47 of which stipulates that:

"It is prohibited to employ young persons under 12 years of age in agricultural work".

122. Article 53 further stipulates that:

> "1. Pregnant workers employed in agricultural work who have spent at least six months in the service of their employer are entitled to 75 days' pre" and post-natal maternity leave on the basis of a medical report specifying their date of delivery. The employers, or their agents, shall not permit women to return to work within 30 days from the date of their delivery.
>
> "2. During their absence on maternity leave, female workers shall receive half their pay."

123. The Syrian Arab Republic has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which contains provisions prohibiting the employment of young persons. In addition to the provisions of the Arab and international conventions that it has ratified, the Syrian Arab Republic also uses some provisions of labour conventions that it has not ratified as guidelines for the formulation and updating of national labour legislation and policies pending the ratification of those instruments.

124. The policy in regard to the employment of children in agricultural work is set forth in the Agricultural Relations Regulatory Act No. 134 of 1958, which stipulates as follows:

> "Article 48: It is prohibited to employ adolescents and youths in agricultural work without the written approval of their guardian (their father, their mother in the absence of the father, or their ascendants or legal guardian in the absence of both).
>
> "Article 49: 'Child' means a person under 12 years of age. 'Adolescent' means a person from 12 to 15 years of age and 'youth' means a person from 15 to 18 years of age. It is prohibited to employ persons under 14 years of age on night work and it is likewise prohibited to employ them in arduous forms of work to which they are not suited by virtue of their age.
>
> "Article 50: Employers and their agents are responsible for verifying the ages of adolescents and youths and for ensuring that their guardians have approved their employment."

125. The employment of young persons is regulated by articles 124-129 in section 3, chapter III, of the Act, which stipulate as follows:

> "Article 124: Young persons under 12 years of age are not permitted to work or to enter places of work and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour may prohibit the employment of young persons under 15 years of age in some industries designated by him. He may also prohibit their employment in other industries if they are under 17 years of age."

126. Pursuant to article 124, Implementing Order No. 417 of 26 August 1959, as amended by Order No. 1206 of 11 December 1974, specified the industries and

occupations in which it is prohibited to employ young persons under 17 years of age.

127. Articles 125-129 state as follows :

"Article 125: It is prohibited to employ young persons under 15 years of age from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. and they shall not be required to actually work for more than six hours per day. They shall not be required to remain at the place of work for more than seven consecutive hours and their working hours must be interspersed by one or more rest periods/meal times totalling not less than one hour. These periods shall be scheduled in such a way as to ensure that such young persons do not work for more than four consecutive hours.

"Article 126: It is prohibited to employ young persons under 15 years of age in the industries and occupations designated by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour unless they have work permits certifying their physical fitness to engage therein. These permits shall be issued free of charge by the Health Office at their request or at the request of their employer and shall be exempt from all fees and taxes.

"Article 127: It is prohibited to require young persons to work overtime in any circumstances whatsoever. They shall not be retained at the place of work beyond the stipulated times and shall not be required to work on rest days. In general, the exceptions provided for in section 2 of this chapter concerning young persons shall not apply to them.

"Article 128: An employer employing one or more young persons shall:

"1. Post a copy of the provisions concerning the employment of young persons at his place of work.

"2. Maintain a regularly updated list showing the names, ages and dates of employment of young persons.

"3. Post a schedule of working hours and rest periods in a prominent location at his place of work.

"4. Inform the competent administrative authority in advance of the names of the persons whom he has appointed to recruit or supervise the work of young persons.

"Article 129: The provisions of this section shall not apply to agricultural workers, nor shall they apply to persons employed in private workshops staffed solely by family members working under the supervision of the father, mother, brother or paternal or maternal uncle."

128. Article 7 of section 3, chapter II, of the Organic Act concerning State employees lays down the following general conditions of appointment: In order to be eligible for appointment, a candidate must be at least 18 years of age when he applies for a post, without prejudice to the legal stipulations in force under which candidates for some posts are required to be over 18 years of age. However, the employment of young persons in production posts and some technical

posts may be exempted from this stipulation subject to the conditions and circumstances defined in the internal regulations of the public body concerned.

129. This provision shows that, in principle, candidates for public posts must be 18 years of age at the time of submission of their application unless the internal regulations of the public body concerned permit the employment of young persons in production-related and technical posts.

Disabled persons

130. The Permanent Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic stipulates that the State shall provide for every citizen and his family in the event of accident, sickness, disability or orphanhood and in old age and Arab and international conventions and social action strategies reaffirm the prevailing attitude under which the disabled are regarded as a social category requiring attention and various forms of care conducive to their integration into the socio-economic development process.

131. Consequently, the problem of the disabled is one of the issues for which the Syrian Arab Republic has shown great concern. In its capacity as the body responsible for the care of the disabled, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has established numerous institutions, schools and centres in most of the main towns in the country's governorates in order to cater for the welfare, education and rehabilitation of the various categories of disabled persons with a view to enabling them to utilize their remaining capacities and facilitating their social adaptation and integration. This is done through the provision of educational, rehabilitation, training and employment services, in addition to the care received by boarders whose circumstances do not enable them to reside outside the institution, in order to enable them to integrate in society and participate in the socio-economic development process.

132. The requisite legislation has been promulgated to regulate the establishment and operation of these institutions for each type of disability and legislative provisions are also in force concerning the employment of blind persons. The quota of disabled persons that public bodies have an obligation to employ has been set at 4 per cent.

133. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is also responsible for the administrative, financial and technical supervision of the voluntary charitable associations that provide such services. The aim of the Ministry's plans in this field are as follows:

(a) To extend welfare services for the disabled to all the Syrian governorates;

(b) To provide care for disabled persons of pre-school age and also for elderly disabled persons;

(c) To develop and improve the services provided at institutions catering for the welfare of disabled persons by providing their staff with further training and supplying them with modern technical equipment and means of transport and communication;

(d) To encourage private national associations and institutions to provide programmes and services for the various categories of disabled persons;

(e) To establish direct or indirect contact with the families of disabled persons in order to provide them with counselling in regard to the provision of appropriate services for their disabled members;

(f) To take the requisite measures to create an increasing number of employment opportunities for disabled persons;

(g) To promote vocational rehabilitation programmes for disabled persons, in collaboration with Arab and international organizations;

(h) To encourage the community-based rehabilitation of disabled persons.

134. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has made great endeavours, particularly during the last three years, to further these aims by organizing numerous training courses, in collaboration with local, Arab and international organizations, for the staff of institutions catering for the social welfare of various categories of disabled persons.

135. The Ministry has also held training courses designed to show families how to look after their disabled members. In addition, the Ministry is endeavouring, through Arab, international and local cooperation and other means, to provide the existing institutions with the equipment and facilities needed to develop their activities.

136. Syria has a number of charitable institutions and associations catering for the welfare of disabled persons in most of the administrative centres of the country's governorates with a view to enabling them to utilize their remaining capacities and facilitating their social adaptation and integration. The institutions include the following centres for the physically disabled:

(a) The Amal (Hope) School for the Welfare of Physically Disabled Children at Damascus, which provides educational, social and health care for disabled persons of primary, preparatory and secondary school age and also offers boarding facilities free of charge for persons living outside the city limits of Damascus;

(b) The Amal School for Physically Disabled Children at Aleppo, which provides the same services as the Amal School at Damascus but admits only children of primary school age;

(c) The Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for the Disabled at Damascus, which provides disabled persons with guidance and training in occupations suited to their condition and their abilities. It also provides medical services and helps disabled persons to obtain prosthetic appliances, such as artificial limbs, orthopaedic corsets and hearing aids. It supplies these appliances free of charge to persons who are unable to afford them and it also offers boarding facilities for persons whose circumstances do not enable them to sleep outside the Centre. All the services that the Centre provides are free of charge. The Centre also awards its graduates a vocational rehabilitation diploma, which is equivalent to a certificate of physical fitness and entitles its recipient to work in either the public or private sectors;

(d) Institutions for the welfare of persons afflicted with cerebral palsy, which provide educational services at the primary level, in addition to

vocational rehabilitation for adults. They also provide physiotherapy, speech-training and other health services, teach patients how to look after themselves and adapt to their circumstances, and offer boarding facilities.

137. Services are also provided by the following national associations concerned with the physically disabled:

(a) The Cerebral Palsy Welfare Association;

(b) The Raja Association for the Disabled;

(c) The Syrian Association for the Physically Disabled;

(d) The Arab Federation of Associations Catering for the Welfare of the Deaf;

(e) The Association for the Welfare of the Blind;

(f) The Federation of Associations Catering for the Welfare of the Deaf in Syria;

(g) The Federation of Associations Catering for the Welfare of the Blind.

138. These associations cater for all aspects of the welfare of disabled persons and provide them with the requisite services.

139. There are 18 associations catering for the welfare of the disabled in all of the country's governorates. There are also seven institutions for the intellectual development of mentally retarded persons, as well as two schools run by charitable associations, which admit children suffering from slight to moderate mental retardation and, after their readaptation, provide them with education in accordance with the syllabuses of the Ministry of Education in a manner consistent with their abilities. The aim of these institutions is to develop the remaining abilities of these disabled persons to the maximum possible extent in order to enable them to adapt and integrate in society.

140. A community-based rehabilitation project for disabled persons is currently being implemented, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization, in three Syrian governorates (Suburban Damascus, Suweida and Latakia) in order to stimulate public awareness concerning the serious problems faced by disabled persons and provide them with opportunities through small production projects.

141. The United Nations Children's Fund and the Central Statistical Office are conducting a joint field survey of disabled persons under 18 years of age in Syria in order to ascertain their number, their geographical distribution and their distribution by age, sex and type of disability.

142. It is noteworthy that Syria has adopted the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which were formulated by a working group and approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

143. On 3 December of every year, Syria celebrates the International Day of Disabled Persons, which was proclaimed by the United Nations, as an

international day for persons suffering from motorial disabilities. It also celebrates the Day of the Blind on 15 October and the Week of the Deaf from 20 to 27 April every year.

Children deprived of a family environment

144. The Syrian Government is endeavouring, through constant public awareness campaigns, to safeguard the cohesion and unity of the family and protect it from corruption and disintegration. The competent authorities provide alternative care for this category of deprived persons through the social welfare institutions that offer shelter to young orphans and vagrants, foundlings, children of unknown parentage and children deprived of family care and meet all their needs in regard to various forms of health, pedagogical, psychological and educational care from infancy to the age of 18 years so that they can become citizens who are a credit to themselves and to their community and also in order to protect them from the risk of delinquency. There are 40 governmental and private institutions of this type.

145. Although adoption is not recognized in the Syrian legal system, Syrian legislation permits filiation and alternative care arrangements are made for foundlings and children of unknown parentage, who can be placed in foster families under the terms of contracts concluded between those families and the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour in his capacity as the guardian of those children until they reach the age of 18 years.

146. The institutions catering for the welfare of foundlings and vagrants include the Zeid ibn Haritha Child Welfare Centre at Damascus, which provides health, educational and social care and support for foundlings until they become self-supporting or are placed in a foster family in accordance with the conditions laid down by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.

147. There is also a Child Support and Foundling Care Association at Aleppo which takes care of foundlings until it finds a suitable foster family for them or until they reach the age of eligibility for admission to an orphanage.

148. The Ibn Rushd Institute for Vagrant Youths at Qudsayya receives vagrant youths placed in its care by the juvenile courts. These are children who have no source of support or who became vagrants due to the break-up of their families. It also receives foundlings from the Zeid bin Haritha Centre, as well as detained juveniles who are sent to it by the Anti-Vagrancy and Begging Section at the Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour at Damascus, and provides them with every form of care required to meet their needs.

Article 11

149. Through the implementation of socio-economic development plans, the Syrian Arab Republic has taken many measures to provide basic services for its citizens, to ensure improved and more appropriate living conditions for them and their families and to curb the growing poverty rate. These measures are largely consistent with the aims and strategies adopted at the conferences held to discuss ways to alleviate and eventually eradicate poverty.

150. The principal policies and programmes adopted in this field are as follows:

(a) Syria's economic policy, which has focused on the need to make greater endeavours to mobilize all the country's resources and capacities in the production sectors, to create new and extensive investment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, to enable all economic resources, sectors and units to make use of these opportunities in order to achieve a steady increase in production and GNP growth rates in the national economy, to further develop the agricultural sector, to develop industry, and particularly the agro-industry, to expand electric power generation capacity for purposes of lighting and economic activities, to improve transport and mobility, particularly between urban and rural areas, to modernize the communications system, to accord priority to rural development, to establish drinking-water supply networks and to promote training activities;

(b) The Government is subsidizing basic foodstuffs in order to protect the lowest-income categories of the people and ensure that they enjoy a decent standard of living;

(c) Small-scale producers are being supported through short" and medium-term loans at nominal interest;

(d) Housing loans at nominal interest are also being granted to persons with a limited or low income so that they can enjoy access to housing constructed by the governmental and cooperative sectors;

(e) Farmers are provided with free agricultural extension services, in addition to veterinary and crop treatment services, by the agricultural training centres and agricultural extension units that can be found in all parts of Syria;

(f) The exploitation of rural resources and capacities is being facilitated by the services rendered by the rural development centres and the counselling units that are promoting the employment of women in their leisure time in order to provide them with a useful source of income that will help them to improve their family's standard of living;

(g) Popular organizations, and particularly the General Federation of Women, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the General Federation of Farmers, are endeavouring to improve the standard of living of the categories benefiting from their activities;

(h) State and non-governmental organizations are providing various forms of social services for indigent families and disadvantaged social categories such as the disabled, the aged, orphans and persons deprived of family care, etc.

151. Reference must be made to the regional symposium, held at Damascus on 28 and 29 February 1996 to discuss the elimination of poverty in the Arab States, which was attended by the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, the Director of the Arab Bureau and experts from the International Labour Organization, the Investment Centre of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Bank, in addition to officials from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labour in the Arab States, in order to study the formulation of a strategy to reduce poverty.

152. The national committee that was formed to monitor the implementation of the resolutions of the Copenhagen Conference requested UNDP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, to undertake a comprehensive field study to determine the poverty line in Syria. A committee, consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the State Planning Board and the Central Statistical Office, was formed to follow up on this matter in collaboration with the UNDP office at Damascus.

153. In keeping with the country's commitment to draw up a national plan to improve the standard of nutrition and eliminate hunger and cases of malnutrition, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform drafted a national plan which was discussed at a special symposium, held by that Ministry on 21 July 1996 and attended by a number of specialists from other Ministries and popular organizations concerned, with a view to its finalization and implementation.

154. With regard to the right to an adequate standard of living, the Syrian Arab Republic has shown special concern for the agricultural sector in view of its important role in the economic development process, since it constitutes the principal source of every individual's vital requirements such as food and clothing. Accordingly, the requisite attention has been given to the development of this sector in order to increase its production levels in furtherance of the policy of food security. The task assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform and the Ministry of Supply and Domestic Trade is to ensure that their policies and services promote growth and sustainable development in agriculture and in the basic food industry. As a result of the outstanding endeavours that have been made in recent years in the agricultural sector, particularly in regard to planning, implementation and field and office follow-up, the pace of activity in most projects has been accelerated and, consequently, the agricultural sector has been able to satisfy the increasing food needs of the population, meet the agricultural commodity requirements of the processing industries and help to create new employment opportunities.

155. The principal achievements in the agricultural and irrigation sector in 1997 were as follows:

(a) More efficient use of natural agricultural resources (land, water and forests);

(b) Market supply of all agricultural commodities from local production in such a way as to meet consumer needs and provide opportunities for export of the surplus;

(c) Assurance of appropriate incomes for agricultural producers, who are encouraged to produce through the pricing policies for agricultural commodities;

(d) Provision of more services for agricultural producers by way of agricultural loans and ancillary production services such as veterinary care, agricultural extension and supply of production requisites, etc.;

(e) More extensive use of biological pesticides on larger areas of orchards and rationalization of chemical pesticide operations against insects and harmful diseases.

156. It is evident, therefore, that the measures taken in 1997 to promote agricultural development have played a positive role in the achievement of the desired aims.

157. The food-related legislation promulgated in the 1970s, which is still in force in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the progress to which it has given rise are based on two principles:

(a) Protection of consumers from sudden price rises, as happens in international markets, by subsidizing the prices of basic foodstuffs such as bread, edible oils, ghee, tea, rice and sugar, which costs the Government billions of Syrian pounds;

(b) Helping the consumers to obtain food in conformity with the health regulations at all times and at appropriate prices.

158. The State is constantly modernizing the methods used to preserve foodstuffs. The following institutions are operating in the field of the storage and distribution of food and other commodities:

159. The State Grain Trading and Processing Agency purchases wheat, lentils and chickpeas and imports wheat, flour, capital goods and spare parts to meet its own needs and those of its subsidiary companies in order to satisfy local consumer needs for these foodstuffs. In 1997, the value of the Agency's domestic purchases amounted to LS 20,737 million and the value of its imports amounted to LS 40 million. Its domestic sales amounted to LS 36,768 million and the value of its exports amounted to LS 11,828 million. The increase in the volume of its overall sales, as compared with 1996, amounted to 17 per cent.

160. In 1997, four mechanized mills with a daily milling capacity of 500 tonnes of wheat per mill were constructed and installed, together with their silos with a storage capacity of 50,000 tonnes per silo. Four silos, with a capacity of 50,000 tonnes each, were constructed and installed and are currently being commissioned at the sites of the new mechanized mills. About 60-90 per cent of the civil engineering work on 25 metallic silos was completed. Two of these silos are in operation and five are being commissioned. A horizontal grain storage site with a capacity of 25,000 tonnes and six small warehouses have been put into operation. Ten mechanized syphons, together with technical and laboratory equipment, were purchased in order to modernize the inflow and outflow operations.

161. The State Flour Milling Company is responsible for managing, maintaining and developing the country's flour mills (belonging to the public sector), together with one lentil-processing plant. In 1997, its mills in the various governorates processed 2,199,000 tonnes of wheat, as compared with 1,963,000 tonnes in 1996, i.e. an increase of 12 per cent. The milling capacity increased by 600,000 tonnes per year after the mechanized mills were put into operation and there was also an increase in the storage capacity of the silos in operation. The sampling methods were modernized through the introduction of mechanized sampling equipment.

162. The State Bakery Company increased the number of its bakeries and various types of production lines and the Company's production in 1997 amounted to 579,451 tonnes, as compared with 577,137 tonnes in 1996. A new production line and a bakery for cereals were also completed in 1997.

163. The Board of Reserve Bakeries produced 112,290 tonnes of bread in 1997, as compared with 105,276 tonnes in 1996, i.e. an increase of 6 per cent. Four new bakeries with automated production lines were put into operation and achieved high-quality production.

164. The State Agency for Consumer Goods is responsible for ensuring that the local markets are always supplied with foodstuffs and other commodities, while maintaining appropriate commercial and strategic reserves. The Agency's sales in 1997 amounted to LS 6,429 million, as compared with LS 2,065,212,000 in 1986. The Agency operates through its distribution outlets in the main towns and regions and in some of the larger districts. The Agency's operations are in the process of being computerized and modern electronic equipment has been purchased with a view to improving production.

165. The State Retail Company engages in retail trade in foodstuffs and other products on a country-wide scale through consumer retail outlets, market halls and shopping centres. The Company's sales amounted to LS 3,898 million in 1997, as compared with LS 3,733 million in 1996, i.e. an increase of 4 per cent. More than 100 outlets have been developed at all the Company's branches throughout the country.

166. The consumer complex project at Aleppo was completed and will be put into operation in 1998.

167. The construction of warehouses, administrative offices and a sales hall at the Idlib branch was completed and they were into operation in 1997.

168. The branches at Damascus, Rural Damascus and Homs were computerized.

169. The State Company for the Management of Grain Silos and Seed and Fodder Stores is responsible for the management and technical operation of the silos and warehouses at the places of production, consumption and export, in addition to the selection, classification and production of seed that has been processed or is to be processed at the seed centre , and the processing of concentrated and super-concentrated fodder.

170. The State Cold Storage Company is an economic organization consisting of a network of units specialized in the management and operation of cold storage facilities and a fleet of refrigerated trucks for foodstuffs (chicken, meat, eggs, cheese, potatoes, apples, citrus fruit, cream, butter, fish, mortadella and other imported and local animal products). It serves the public, private and mixed cooperative sectors for a fixed commission.

171. The Company's income in 1997 amounted to LS 135 million, as compared with LS 145 million in 1996.

172. The civil engineering work was completed on the Martyr Basil al-Assad refrigeration plant project at Hama, which has a storage capacity of 7,000 tonnes.

173. The refrigeration plant at Homs, which has a storage capacity of 6,000 tonnes, was put into operation.

174. The renovation of 10 cold stores at Damascus (Mezze) was completed.

175. The refrigeration plants at the cold storage facilities at Hama and Idlib were renovated.

176. A contract was signed for the renovation of the ice plant at Damascus.

177. The State Fruit and Vegetable Company supplies fruit and vegetables for the domestic and foreign markets and distributes them to consumers and retailers in order to meet domestic consumer demand for such produce. In 1997, purchases amounted to LS 865 million while sales totalled LS 848 million.

178. Cold storage facilities were inaugurated and put into operation at the sorting and processing centres at al-Hasakah, al-Raqqah, Tartous and al-Kiswa. The sales centre at Tartous was inaugurated and put into operation.

179. The sorting and processing centre at Tartous, together with its subsidiary buildings, was inaugurated and preparations were made for it to be put into operation. The retail sales outlets were expanded and developed.

180. The State Meat Company procures meat, as needed, and supplies a number of meat sales centres, in addition to meeting the needs of government hospitals, clubs and cafeterias. Its domestic sales amounted to LS 430 million in 1997, as compared with LS 460 million in 1996.

181. The Consumer Cooperative Associations discharge the following functions:

(a) They ensure a regular supply of reasonably priced goods to consumers at their places of work and residence, thereby avoiding the middlemen and the monopolies and fraud in which some traders might engage;

(b) In collaboration with the governmental domestic trade sector, they help to stabilize prices and reduce the cost of transporting goods from their sources to the consumer;

(c) They cushion consumers against fabricated supply shortages and have a positive influence on the domestic trade market to the benefit of consumers, particularly in working-class and rural areas;

(d) They endeavour to increase the number and variety of consumer goods available to the rural population;

(e) They make use of the personal savings of citizens which they invest, in the latter's interest, in the field of domestic trade under State supervision in order to provide consumer goods for citizens on appropriate terms;

(f) They create a suitable environment for the programming and planning of consumer cooperative activities in the State's five-year plans with a view to controlling consumer supply and demand, developing and modernizing domestic trade and avoiding waste, unprogrammed consumption and disguised unemployment;

(g) They transform economic relationships in the field of domestic trade and keep pace with progress in the Syrian Arab Republic by creating a public trade sector which complements and supplements the consumer cooperative sector and enjoys support from the State.

182. In the social sector:

(a) The consumer cooperatives are helping to create a spirit of solidarity among their members and offer ample scope for the effective practice of democracy;

(b) The cooperatives train their staff in collective management and enable the masses to play a prominent role in safeguarding the assets of their shareholders;

(c) They cushion unemployment by providing employment opportunities in sales, administrative and financial operations;

(d) They contribute to the organization and modernization of society by establishing highly-developed sales outlets containing a wide range of goods, particularly in rural areas.

183. The economic and social achievements of the country's consumer cooperatives can be summarized as follows:

(a) Through their sales outlets which have been established in residential areas and industrial zones, the 145 consumer cooperative associations supply all types of perishable and durable consumer goods to their members and other citizens at prices fixed by the State. Their sales amounted to LS 2,795 million in 1997;

(b) They are helping to stabilize prices as far as possible and are protecting citizens from exploitation and monopoly. They sell consumer goods to workers at their places of work, in the towns and in the most remote rural areas of the country at the same price;

(c) There is full cooperation between the consumer cooperatives and the governmental domestic trade sector, which is supervised by the Ministry of Supply and Domestic Trade, so that consumer goods, and particularly basic foodstuffs, can be distributed between these two sectors and supplied to consumers at standard prices in such a way as to avoid supply bottlenecks and exploitation, thereby enabling the Ministry to exercise virtually full control over the distribution channels;

(d) Annual and five-year plans have been formulated for cooperative activities and, consequently, consumer cooperatives are no longer being developed in a random manner. Relations between the public production sector, the public commercial sector and the consumer cooperatives have also been regulated in such a way as to ensure that goods are delivered directly to the consumers without passing through middlemen, who would otherwise influence all aspects of distribution as well as the final prices;

(e) Use is made of the savings of the 628,979 members of consumer cooperative associations whose share capital amounts to LS 875 million, in addition to the assets that the associations have accumulated since the beginning of their operations in 1950. These accumulated assets, together with the shareholders' equity, constitute the working capital of these associations which, through their activities, have achieved net profits of LS 94.5 million;

(f) In the exercise of their daily activities, the consumer cooperative associations constitute an appropriate environment for the creation of a spirit of solidarity and the practice of democracy in mutual relations between their members, who elect the associations' boards of directors from among themselves, thereby establishing executive bodies capable of managing the affairs and achieving the goals of the cooperatives;

(g) The establishment of well-equipped and decorated modern sales outlets, in the form of complexes and halls in urban and rural areas in which a wide variety of goods are available on a self-service basis, has introduced an element of modernization to which the private sector is averse, particularly in rural areas, since the private sector is interested only in easy profits while the activities of the cooperatives have social as well as economic aims and aspirations for the achievement of which part of their profits are allocated to the development of the areas in which they operate.

184. With regard to the role and extent of governmental support in the development of consumer cooperative associations, in principle, the establishment of consumer cooperative associations presupposes a desire and a need therefor on the part of a group of citizens and governmental involvement is confined to a study of the extent to which such associations are likely to succeed in achieving their goals and the feasibility of the measures provided for in Act No. 317 of 1956. The Act vests the governmental authority with certain mandatory powers to, inter alia, monitor the proper operation of the associations and supervise their managerial staff in order to protect their assets by providing them with operational guidance and counselling and helping them to solve problems and difficulties that they might encounter.

185. However, the Ministry of Supply, in its capacity as the governmental body responsible for implementing the policy of the State, has provided the consumer cooperatives with numerous forms of moral and material support, such as the following:

(a) The promulgation of regulations governing the proper operation of the associations from the administrative, financial, accounting and personnel standpoints;

(b) The holding, within the country, of numerous training courses on various aspects of cooperative activities such as management accounting, planning, control and supervision, in addition to sending future cooperative executives to attend short- and long-term courses at cooperative institutes in some foreign States.

(c) The holding of conferences and symposia to study the situation of the consumer cooperatives, discuss their problems, propose appropriate solutions and determine the prospects for their future development;

(d) The secondment of some civil servants with experience in administration and accountancy to work with the associations on the understanding that their salaries would be paid from the budget of the Ministry of Supply and Domestic Trade;

(e) Provision of direct material support, in the form of grants, for a number of associations (provision of vehicles, equipment, computers, cash registers and funds for the construction of complexes and halls, etc.). It is

noteworthy that such support has increased considerably since the beginning of the Corrective Movement in 1970;

(f) The Ministry of Supply and Domestic Trade has issued clear and explicit instructions concerning the procedural requirements for the establishment and operation of consumer cooperative associations, although these regulations can be modified, if any new developments so require, on the basis of a field study undertaken by the cooperative supervisors and subsequently discussed with the Ministry in the light of the recommendations made by its officials.

186. Finally, in order to develop the country's cooperative movement so that it can achieve the goals to which it is aspiring:

(a) We hope that the staff of our cooperatives will be invited to participate in the cooperative conferences organized by the developed countries and the United Nations so that they can benefit from the experiences of more highly developed cooperatives. We also hope that the operational and supervisory staff of Syria's consumer cooperative associations will be invited to attend cooperative training courses;

(b) We would like to receive regular reports on the activities and achievements of the cooperative movement throughout the world, as well as the recommendations of international conferences concerning cooperatives, and particularly consumer cooperatives.

187. With regard to the right to adequate housing, housing is a basic human need and, consequently, the State has shown particular concern for the housing sector in order to provide appropriate housing that ensures the safety, stability, physical comfort and mental tranquillity of families. To this end, the State has adopted the following main strategies:

(a) Encouragement and support of the housing cooperative sector;

(b) The granting of bank loans on easy terms;

(c) The production of prefabricated dwellings to meet the rapidly increasing needs for new housing;

(d) Regulation of the owner-tenant relationship in such a way as to protect the tenant and promote family stability.

188. The public sector bodies concerned with housing consist basically of the following:

(a) The Ministry of Housing and Utilities. The aim of this Ministry is to overcome the housing problem by ensuring the availability of salubrious dwellings for citizens and planning the construction of residential areas in such a way as to meet the requirements for social development and progress in the country and ensure proper sanitation and a supply of pure drinking water in order to avoid the risks that environmental pollution poses to the health and safety of citizens;

(b) The Public Housing Authority. This Authority, which is an organ of the Ministry of Housing and Utilities, plays a significant role in the study and

implementation of housing plans and the application of the Saving for Home Ownership Act. The Authority has constructed thousands of dwellings in the following categories:

(i) Low-cost housing. About 18,000 housing units have been constructed to accommodate about 110,000 persons with limited income, including State employees, the families of martyrs and recipients of eviction notices whose dwellings are to be demolished;

(ii) Housing supplied under the home ownership saving scheme. About 6,800 housing units have been constructed to accommodate about 41,000 members of families subscribing to the scheme in accordance with the provisions of the Saving For Home Ownership Act No. 38 of 1978;

(iii) Housing for university professors. About 600 housing units have been constructed to accommodate about 3,600 family members in this category;

(iv) Working-class housing. About 4,000 housing units have been constructed to accommodate about 24,000 members of families of public sector workers. They are distributed by the General Federation of Trade Unions, which is endeavouring to ensure the availability of appropriate housing close to the place of work.

189. With regard to future plans, the Authority's proposed plan for 1998 includes numerous projects in all the governorates for the above-mentioned categories, as detailed below:

(a) Low-cost housing: the Authority proposes to begin the construction of 1,062 housing units distributed among the governorates of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, al-Raqqah, al-Hasakah, Qamishli and Suweida;

(b) Housing supplied under the home ownership saving scheme: the Authority proposes to begin the construction of 1,880 housing units distributed among the districts of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Deir az-Zor, al-Raqqah, al-Hasakah " al-Malikiya, Qamishli, Latakia, Jablah and Suweida " Nawa;

(c) Housing for university professors: The Authority proposes to begin the construction of 242 housing units distributed among the governorates of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Deir az-Zor;

(d) Working-class housing: The Authority proposes to begin the construction of 428 housing units distributed among the governorates of Damascus, Idlib, Deir az-Zor and Aleppo.

190. The following is a more detailed breakdown of the housing constructed by the Authority in some Syrian governorates:

(a) Governorate of Damascus. The Authority has so far constructed a total of about 24,868 housing units distributed among the four categories as follows:

- 20,700 low-cost housing units in a number of areas (Barzeh, al-Yarmouk, al-Qa'a, the Airport suburb and Mezze).

- 2,160 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in a number of areas (Barzeh, al-Yarmouk and Mezze).
- 208 housing units for university professors in the Shaghour Basatin area.
- 1,800 working-class housing units at Adra.

It should be noted that about 3,600 housing units are currently being constructed as part of the New Qudsayya project and 1,366 in the Adra/Mezze/al-Yarmouk area;

(b) Governorate of Aleppo: The Authority has constructed about 6,274 housing units as follows:
- 1,854 low-cost housing units in the Hanano and Hamdaniya districts;
- 3,120 housing units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the Hanano and Hamdaniya districts;
- 1,300 working-class housing units in the Hanano district.

About 2,237 housing units are currently being constructed in the Shuhada, Karm al-Qasr, Hanano and urban expansion districts for distribution among the four categories;

(c) Governorate of Homs: The Authority has constructed about 1,865 housing units as follows:
- 1,500 low-cost housing units;
- 365 housing units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme;
- 700 housing units are currently being constructed in the area to the west of the Damascus-Homs highway and about 300 units in the al-Wa'r area.

(d) Governorate of Idlib and town of al-Bab: The Authority has constructed about 350 low-cost housing units and is currently constructing about 60 working-class units in the town of Idlib;

(e) Governorate of Hama: The Authority has constructed about 1,647 housing units as follows:
- 400 low-cost housing units in the area to the south of the Barracks and in Housing Area No. 1;
- 435 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the area to the south of the Barracks and in Housing Area No. 1;
- 30 housing units for university professors.
- 782 working-class housing units in the Jajiya and Abul-Fida districts.

About 1,100 working-class housing units are currently being constructed in the Naqarneh and Jajiya districts.

(f) Governorate of Latakia. The Authority has constructed about 800 housing units as follows:
- 597 low-cost housing units in the Zaqzaqaniya, Hayy al-A'ideen and Tawq al-Balad districts;
- 53 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the Zaqzaqaniya and Hayy al-A'ideen districts;
- 150 housing units for university professors in the Tawq al-Balad district.

(g) The town of Qirdaha: The Authority has constructed about 550 low-cost housing units in the Martyr Basil al-Assad residential suburb at Qirdaha;

(h) Governorate of Tartous: The Authority has constructed about 474 housing units as follows:

- 243 low-cost housing units in the Rama district and to the east of the Free Zone;
- 157 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the Rama district and to the east of the Free Zone;
- 74 working-class housing units.

(i) Governorate of Der'a: The Authority has constructed about 300 housing units as follows:

- 270 low-cost housing units in the Dam and Izra districts;
- 30 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme.

(j) Governorate of Suweida: The Authority has constructed about 150 low-cost housing units.

(k) The town of Raqqah: The Authority has constructed about 530 low-cost housing units in the Dir'iya and southern Dir'iya areas and 72 units under the home ownership saving scheme in the southern Dir'iya district.

(l) The Eastern Region: The Authority has constructed about 1,207 housing units distributed as follows:

- Qamishli: 115 low-cost housing units in the al-Bashiriya district and 76 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the Assyrian quarter;
- Deir az-Zor: 23 low-cost housing units and 185 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme;
- Al-Hasakah " al-Malikiya: 634 low-cost housing units at al-Hasakah, 36 low-cost housing units at al-Malikiya, 78 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme in the eastern al-Nashwa district at al-Hasakah and 60 units constructed under the home ownership saving scheme at al-Malikiya.

191. The Syrian Arab Republic has housing cooperatives that are endeavouring to facilitate home ownership by persons with limited income through easy payments in instalments at low interest. They obtain construction material at reasonable prices for the housing cooperative sector. These cooperatives are supervised by the local administrative authorities in each governorate within the framework of the indirect overall central supervision of the Ministry of Housing and Utilities.

192. The special characteristic of the housing cooperatives is that, by law, they enjoy exemption from taxes and other dues in order to encourage them and to promote the values of the cooperative movement in the housing sector.

193. Plans have been made to improve the performance of the sector for the benefit of the limited-income social category by, inter alia, facilitating greater participation, protecting the rights of members of cooperatives and encouraging membership of cooperatives in order to ensure the availability of salubrious, reasonably priced and appropriate housing, safeguard the independence of cooperative associations and promote the self-management of cooperative relations and cooperative functions. The supply of housing through the acquisition of land, the construction of dwellings and the provision of basic services, and encouragement of local community participation in the housing cooperative sector enable this important sector to contribute more

effectively to the provision of housing and shelter, the most vital needs of individuals and families, which constitute the most important development and investment activities at the official governmental and non-official private levels.

194. The various fields and forms of development focus on the social environment, in which housing is the main component, and development within this context therefore has an impact in all social fields.

195. Seventy-one associations were established in 1995, 120 in 1996 and 94 in 1997. The general associations are not confined to a specific sector, while the private associations are so confined. The Ministry of Housing and Utilities, in collaboration with the other governmental bodies concerned, is endeavouring to meet all the housing sector's requirements for land, construction materials, loans, water, electricity and other utilities in order to provide appropriate and reasonably priced housing for members of cooperatives. The Ministry is playing an effective role in the application of the Act, the cooperative rules and the other regulations in force through the computerization of cooperative operations. It is endeavouring to improve the sector's efficiency so that it can play its carefully designated role more effectively. The Ministry is also establishing and registering associations in rural areas for which master plans have been drawn up. Considerable achievements have been made by virtue of the Housing Cooperatives Act No. 13 of 1981, under which many privileges and exemptions are accorded to cooperative dwellings covering an area of more than 130 m^2 (art. 44). Such dwellings are exempt from building permit fees and stamp duty and are also exempt from real estate taxes for a period of seven years from the beginning of the fiscal year following the issue of the building permit. The Development Agency supplies cooperative projects with various types of building materials (iron, cement, wood, tiles, etc.) at officially fixed prices in order to reduce the cost of cooperative housing.

196. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the membership of cooperative associations amounted to about 450,000 in 1998, as compared with 25,000 in 1970. In the legislative field, a bill of law has been proposed under which some of the articles of the Act currently in force would be amended in the following manner:

(a) Syrian expatriates would be permitted to join the associations, without the need to meet the residence requirement, in order to strengthen those citizens' links to their mother country.

(b) The summer resort associations engaged in property transactions would be subject to the provisions of the Housing Cooperatives Act No. 13 of 1981;

(c) Members of cooperatives would have a preferential right to own two dwellings (a permanent residence and a temporary summer residence), in addition to other privileges.

197. This bill of law is awaiting completion of the procedures for its promulgation.

198. The Ministry is the governmental body responsible for the field and office supervision and control of the sector and its operations in order to ensure that

they are in conformity with the laws and regulations in force. It performs this function in collaboration with the local supervisory bodies and the boards and committees of the associations, which discharge their legally specified tasks in a democratic and free manner.

199. The Ministry of Housing and Utilities issued Directive No. 6929/14/11/SD of 10 December 1996 concerning the licensing of summer resort association projects in accordance with the Higher Council for Tourism report No. 132 of 1996. In short, the Ministry is providing this sector with full and appropriate support, in a manner consistent with the rule of law, in order to ensure its progress and prosperity and meet the needs of members of cooperatives for salubrious housing at reasonable and acceptable cooperative prices.

200. The Government is continuing to improve the standard of social and community services and, in this regard, is reducing the disparities between urban and rural areas in order to encourage the rural population to remain in their areas of residence, thereby curbing migration to urban areas. The principal achievements made in the field of housing and utilities are as follows.

201. Project work completed in 1997:

(a) Completion of 18 per cent of the project for a third pipeline to the city of Latakia and signature of a contract for the procurement of water pipes for the project;

(b) Completion of 81 per cent of the Jourin unified water project to irrigate the Salanfa area of the project and supply a number of villages in the governorate of Hama-Idlib;

(c) Completion of 81 per cent of the fourth pipeline from the Euphrates to the city of Aleppo and continuation of the work on the tunnel and the pumping stations;

(d) Completion of 15 per cent of the project to pump water from the Saffaq dam to the town of Qamishli and the villages along the pipeline, and signature of a contract for the procurement of the water pipes;

(e) Completion of the project to expand the water purification plant in the city of Hama;

(f) Completion of 90 per cent of the project to replace and renovate the water supply network in the city of Homs;

(g) Signature of a contract for the procurement of equipment and water pipes for the Beit Yashout water project;

(h) Completion of three model purification plants with a capacity of 80 m^3/hour each in the governorate of Deir az-Zor;

(i) Completion of 20 per cent of the civil engineering works at the Martyr Basil al-Assad water purification plant (capacity 150,000 m^3/year) at Deir az-Zor;

(j) Signature of a contract for the procurement of 11 mechanical excavators and 11 bulldozers for the Water Authorities, and appropriation of the foreign exchange needed for their purchase;

(k) Completion of the boring of exploratory wells in the Qalamoun area, together with a hydrological study of the area;

(l) Completion of 85 per cent of the project to supply Nawa with water from the Ash'ari river in the governorate of Der'a;

(m) Completion of 50 per cent of the water network project in 10 localities;

(n) Completion of the study of the following projects:

(i) The water supply networks at Abta', Mahajja, Mughriya, Busra al-Harir and eastern al-Ghariya in the governorate of Der'a;
(ii) Study of the Sahwa dam water purification plant in the governorate of Suweida;
(iii) Study of the second phase of the project to supply water to the villages of Jard al-Anaza;
(iv) Study of the Ain al-Arqa water project in the governorate of Idlib.

202. Sewage:

(a) The sewage project in the city of Damascus was completed and commissioning began in the early part of 1998. Lighting is still being installed along the sewer line and the contractual work is in the process of being completed;

(b) The treatment plant and pipelines for the sewage network in the city of Homs were completed and the plant is expected to be put into operation during the first quarter of 1998. A study of the second phase of the expansion is being undertaken;

(c) Seventy per cent of the sewage network and treatment plant project in the city of Hama was completed in 1997, as compared with only 60 per cent in 1996, and 85 per cent of the project is expected to be completed in 1998;

(d) The main automatically operated line to the pumping station was completed in the main sewage and waste water treatment plant project in the city of Aleppo;

(e) Eighty per cent of the sedimentation basins were completed at the treatment plant and the mechanical and electrical equipment was procured. Commissioning is expected to begin at the end of 1998;

(f) Following the signature of the contract, work began on a main automatically operated sewer in the town of Deir az-Zor;

(g) A contract was signed for the sewage network in the Tishrin district of the town of Raqqah;

(h) A regional sewage study was completed in the governorate of Der'a and detailed studies are continuing with a view to the signature of successive contracts for the project components.

203. The following studies were completed by the Ministry of Housing and Utilities and the Public Corporation for Technical Studies and Investments:

(a) The liquid waste treatment plant for the municipal abbatoir at Hama;

(b) The sewage treatment plant for the town of Shaikh al-Badr in the governorate of Tartous;

(c) The water treatment plant for the town of Zabadani and the villages of Madhaya, Biqin, Ain Sur and Rawdha in the governorate of Damascus;

(d) The preliminary preparatory study of the sewage treatment plant at Raqqah;

(e) The preliminary study of the sewage treatment plant at al-Hasakah;

(f) The preliminary study of the sewage treatment plant at Deir az-Zor;

(g) A study of model natural treatment plants for small localities;

(h) A study of sewage projects at Abu Qubeis, al-Kana'is, al-Kharab and al-Muntazahat in the governorate of Hama and in the town of Dreikish in the governorate of Tartous;

(i) Fifty per cent of the project to modernize and develop the sewage system at Safita was completed.

204. Finally, the following facts should be highlighted:

(a) There are no homeless persons in Syria;

(b) The housing problem is encountered mainly in the principal cities (the administrative centres of the governorates);

(c) The aim of providing sufficient housing has been achieved, to a large extent, in a manner consistent with the population growth;

(d) The efforts still required relate primarily to:

(i) The improvement of housing and the development of services and utilities in the population agglomerations;
(ii) The achievement of an urban/rural balance in order to promote demographic and residential stability;
(iii) The use and development of land for housing in order to minimize the area of waste or under-utilized land;
(iv) The need to preserve a clean and healthy environment, protected from all forms of rural and urban pollution.

(e) The principle that housing has a social function and is not a commercial commodity is being observed as far as possible;

(f) Every citizen has a right to housing and society and the public authorities have an obligation to help citizens to exercise this right, since no person should be homeless in Syrian territory.

Article 12

205. The Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a report on the current health situation to the World Health Organization and, since reference can be made to that report, there is no need to repeat that information under this article.

206. Our national health policy guidelines focus on the following priorities:

(a) The State believes that every citizen has a basic right to enjoy the highest standard of health;

(b) Development of the health sector forms part of the overall socio-economic development process;

(c) Emphasis must be placed on preventive medicine, which must be accorded the highest priority in the services sector in order to make basic health services available to the whole population and achieve the WHO goal of "Health for All by the Year 2000" which enjoys national political support. Endeavours are being made to achieve this goal through the programmes and activities of the primary health-care institutions (primary health services, maternal care and family planning, immunization against contagious and endemic diseases, environmental health, promotion of healthy nutrition, provision of a safe water supply, health education, oral and dental hygiene and care of the aged). The administrative and technical structure of primary health care has been developed at the central and local levels in such a way as to constitute an integrated system conducive to the promotion of development through collaboration among all the sectors concerned with health and development. The functions and obligations of these institutions have been defined within the framework of a referral system and a list has been prepared of the basic medicines to be stocked at the primary health-care centres. The number of health centres amounted to 997 in 1997, as compared with 955 in 1996. They comprised ordinary and specialized health centres, polyclinics and medical aid stations. It is estimated that, on average, each centre was serving 15,145 citizens in 1997, as compared with 15,307 in 1996. The health centres were attended by 12,381,277 patients in 1997, as compared with 11,910,911 patients in 1996. One of the principal services rendered by the primary health-care institutions was child immunization. Two intensive vaccination campaigns were organized, in addition to the regular programmed vaccinations in accordance with internationally recognized medical principles;

(d) The therapeutic sector must be strengthened, modernized and developed through the establishment of health institutions, provided with the requisite modern equipment and facilities and qualified medical staff, in all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. These services are currently provided through 53 hospitals comprising 9,670 beds at which 9,421,096 patients were treated in 1997, as compared with 8,420,504 patients in 1996. All health services, which are of the highest possible standard, are provided free of charge for all citizens at all the hospitals and health centres;

(e) Ambulance services, which constitute the first stage in the administration of first aid and the transport of patients wherever they may be, must be strengthened;

(f) Priority must be accorded to the provision of health services in rural and remote areas and in large population agglomerations. This is illustrated by the "healthy villages" project, a community-based project designed, sponsored and monitored by the Ministry of Health and adopted by the village community, with assistance from other public bodies, with a view to improving all aspects of village living conditions, particularly in the health, environmental, social and economic fields. Although the project is still in its infancy, it has made significant achievements in the villages that it covers and it is expected to be gradually extended to all rural areas of the Syrian Arab Republic;

(g) Locally produced pharmaceuticals must be quality-controlled to ensure that they meet the actual needs. There are currently 43 pharmaceutical laboratories producing 80 per cent of the country's needs, in conformity with the health standards set in 1995, and this percentage is increasing as the industry becomes more highly developed. Control mechanisms are in operation, including a central pharmaceutical testing laboratory, and scientific research is being promoted. The Ministry is currently establishing a health research centre to monitor the environment and safeguard public health from harmful environmental factors and pathogenic agents, for which staff are constantly being trained. Health research competitions have been organized, for which 770 research papers were submitted in 1995. The health institutions have participated actively in the organization of international medical symposia and conferences and have begun an ongoing teaching programme covering all fields of medical specialization. More than 40 courses are held every year. The quantitative and qualitative aspects of the internship system have been developed and the Ministry awards 40 specialized medical diplomas after theoretical and practical training in accordance with the most up-to-date scientific syllabuses. The number of interns currently amounts to about 3,000 and important new fields of specialization have been introduced, such as public health, family medicine, clinical medicative control and pharmaceutical processing and control;

(h) The public, as well as the health authorities, must participate actively in endeavours to improve the efficiency of the health services.

207. The health situation has improved considerably, in keeping with the social progress that Syria has enjoyed, as shown by the following indicators:

Indicators of the health situation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Description	Total	Year
Infant mortality rate (per 1 000 live births)	30	1995
Maternal mortality rate (per 100 000 live births)	97	1995
Proportion of population enjoying a safe water supply	79.5%	1995
Proportion of population enjoying sanitation	71%	1995

Description	Total	Year
Proportion of population enjoying health care by trained personnel	95%	1995
Proportion of pregnant women enjoying health care by trained personnel	90%	1995
Infants enjoying health care by trained personnel	96%	1995
Proportion of GNP allocated to health	3.33%	1997
Per capita share of annual health budget	LS 464.94	1997
Life expectancy at birth	Overall 67.1 Males 66.6 Females 67.6	1995
Children immunized against tuberculosis	100%	1997
Children immunized with MMR + poliomyelitis vaccine	98%	1997
Children immunized against measles	93%	1997

Source: National survey of maternal and child health conducted in 1995 by the Directorate of Primary Health Care.

	Year	Total
1. Demographic and social data		
Resident population (in millions)	1997	15.1
Population breakdown by age group:		
Under 5 years	1997	14.9%
Under 15 years	1997	44.7%
65 years and above	1997	5%
Overall fertility rate	1994	4.22
2. Health resources (per 10 000 of the population)		
Physicians	1997	13.03
Dentists	1997	4.6
Pharmacists	1997	4.7
Nurses	1997	18.03
Hospital beds	1997	11.7
Health centres	1997	0.66
3. Health activities		
Vaccination coverage		
Measles vaccine	1997	93%
Hepatitis B	1997	84%
Neonatal tetanus	1997	92%
Children with a birth weight of 2.5 kg or more	1997	93%
Proportion of population enjoying health care	1997	95%
Proportion of women delivered by trained personnel	1997	83%

	Year	Total
Proportion of women delivered in hospital .	1997	35%
Proportion of married women aged 15-49 years using family planning methods	1997	60.4%
Proportion of children who are breastfed . .	1997	91.5%
4. The health situation:		
Overall morbidity rate	1996	25.8 per 1 000
Incidence of digestive disorders	1996	4 per 1 000
Incidence of respiratory disorders	1996	2.9 per 1 000
Incidence of circulatory disorders	1996	2.3 per 1 000
Incidence of urinary and reproductive disorders	1996	2.1 per 1 000
Incidence of contagious diseases	1996	1.7 per 1 000
Incidence of tumours	1996	8.0 per 1 000
Incidence of endocrinopathy	1996	0.7 per 1 000
Incidence of blood diseases	1996	0.7 per 1 000
Incidence of neurovascular diseases	1996	0.35 per 1 000
Incidence of the following diseases per 100 000 persons:		
Diphtheria	1997	0.07
Poliomyelitis	1997	-
Measles	1997	45.96
Malaria	1997	0.54
Neonatal tetanus	1997	0.29
Meningitis	1997	4.06
Tuberculosis	1997	32.9
Adult tetanus	1997	0.32
Overall mortality rate (per 1 000)	1997	6
Infant mortality rate (per 1 000 live births)	1997	30
Mortality rate among children under 5 years of age	1997	34
Maternal mortality rate (per 100 000 live births)	1995	97
Average life expectancy (in years)	1997	67
(Mortality rates published in the WHO Yearbook)		
Safe water supply (Ministry of Housing):		
Urban areas	1993	96%
Rural areas	1993	79%
Overall	1993	88%
Availability of sanitation services (Ministry of Housing and Utilities):		
Urban areas	1993	74%
Rural areas	1993	29%
Overall	1993	52%

208. There is no form of discrimination based on gender, origin or religion in regard to health care, which is available to all social categories on an equal footing. The aim of our national laws and practices is to improve the standard of health services and make them available to all citizens without exception.

209. The measures that the Government has taken to reduce mortality among children and ensure their healthy growth are illustrated by their immunization against contagious diseases through the administration of vaccines, which the Alma Ata Conference designated as one of the eight components of primary health care. Our national vaccination programme is designed to achieve the goals set in the national plan of action for the survival, development and protection of children, which are the same as those set at the World Summit for Children. These goals, which we are endeavouring to achieve by the year 2000, are as follows.

210. Eradication of infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis) by reaching and maintaining a zero incidence of this viral disease through elimination of the virus from the environment. The following activities are needed to achieve this goal:

(a) A further increase in the vaccination coverage rates in every governorate, district and locality with a view to ensuring that more than 90 per cent of the children receive three doses of the oral vaccine in addition to the so-called "zero dose" which is administered during the first week of the child's life;

(b) The joint organization, by official and popular bodies, of national poliomyelitis vaccination campaigns for children under five years of age, regardless of their immunization status, accompanied by central and local public information campaigns coinciding with the arrival of the vaccine in each locality. Such campaigns, in two phases separated by an interval of one month, have been organized every year since 1993 and are due to continue until 1998. The areas in which the risk of infection is greatest have been identified and local campaigns have been organized there to vaccinate children on a house-to-house basis;

(c) Strengthening of the monitoring system for the detection and follow-up of all cases of acute flaccid paralysis, in which laboratory tests should be carried out to ascertain that they are not caused by the poliomyelitis virus. A national technical committee has been established to monitor these cases and draw up a definitive pathological classification. Measures are also being taken to ensure that all hospitals and health institutions transmit monthly reports on the incidence of cases of paralysis. All these reports (100 per cent) have been received and 80 per cent of them have been transmitted on time.

Number of cases of acute flaccid paralysis (other than infantile paralysis)

1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
4	22	46	81	74

(d) Increased support for the National Virus Laboratory, which was established to analyse stool samples from suspected cases and persons who have been in contact with them and was subsequently upgraded so that it could test for antibodies and determine the type of virus;

(e) The number of cases reported in recent years is as follows:

1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
13	24	22	-	2	4	-

211. Eradication of neonatal tetanus through the following activities:

(a) An increase in the anti-tetanus vaccination coverage of all women of childbearing age to a very high level, particularly in high-risk areas. During the poliomyelitis vaccination campaigns, tetanus anti-toxin has already been administered to women in high-risk areas;

(b) An increase in the proportion of hygienic births (delivery by trained personnel under technical supervision). This proportion currently stands at 79 per cent;

(c) Development of the monitoring system and adoption of measures to prevent the occurrence of other cases through public awareness campaigns, vaccination of women of childbearing age, follow-up by the person who supervised the delivery, and effective detection of cases through periodic inspections of hospital records;

(d) Conduct of studies on children protected from neonatal tetanus at birth (44 per cent were so protected in 1993 and 68 per cent in 1995);

(e) Number of cases reported:

Year	Number	Year	Number
1984	151	1991	50
1985	124	1992	82
1986	192	1993	74
1987	140	1994	74
1988	116	1995	105
1989	90	1996	60
1990	55		

These figures show the total number reported in all areas except one, which is regarded as a high-risk area.

212. Reduction in the incidence of measles and measles-related mortality. This necessitates:

(a) A sustained increase in the rates of vaccination coverage in all populated localities in order to ensure protection from this disease. With effect from 1993, the vaccination schedule was modified to include a second dose for children at the age of 15 months;

(b) Prevention of outbreaks at schools. To this end, the measles vaccine has been included among the vaccines administered to pupils in the first primary grade;

(c) Proper treatment of cases, particularly through the administration of vitamin A and stimulation of public awareness concerning the need to seek early medical advice, which has reduced the mortality rate;

(d) Measles occurs in the form of outbreaks. As a result of the vaccination programme, the intervals between these outbreaks have become longer. The number of cases is shown below:

1993	1994	1995	1996
2 781	1 334	1 420	1 366

(e) The measles-related mortality is as follows:

1993	1994	1995	1996
11	1	-	-

213. In addition to the three above-mentioned diseases (measles, infantile paralysis and tetanus), the vaccination programme covers whooping cough, diphtheria, tuberculosis and hepatitis B. Although excellent coverage rates have been achieved the following aspects are still being emphasized:

(a) The need to supply good-quality vaccines in conformity with the standard specifications;

(b) The need to ensure hygienic and sterile conditions for the administration of vaccines by using disposable (single-use) syringes and needles in order to avoid jaundice or AIDS;

(c) The need to ensure a cold chain at all stages from the airport to the place of use through temperature controls, maintenance of refrigeration systems and replacement of those that are old;

(d) The need to carefully train and constantly supervise personnel in order to ensure their proper performance.

214. Rates of coverage of children under one year of age (full vaccination in the approved manner) in 1996:

(a)	Third inoculation (whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus)	97 per cent
(b)	Third dose of poliomyelitis vaccine	97 per cent
(c)	Measles vaccination	96 per cent
(d)	Tuberculosis vaccination	100 per cent
(e)	Tetanus vaccination for pregnant women	55 per cent
(f)	Third inoculation of hepatitis B vaccine	83 per cent

215. The vaccination programme has been the most successful health programme ever applied and, therefore, can be used as a guideline for the implementation of other health programmes.

216. There is a good data-processing system that can compute the coverage rates of every vaccine on a periodic basis and a field survey of these rates is conducted every few years.

217. The excellent coverage rates must continue to be maintained in every district, area and locality.

Prevention and control of endemic diseases

218. Malaria was one of the principal endemic diseases and one of the most serious health problems in the Syrian Arab Republic from the 1940s to the end of the 1970s when the national anti-malaria programme, conducted in collaboration with international organizations, succeeded in reducing the number of reported cases and infested areas. By the beginning of the 1980s, the number of cases had declined to a few hundred. However, this was accompanied by an increase in the number of reported cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis, a disease that has long been endemic in Syria, and an expansion of the infested areas. One of the main reasons for this was the suspension of drip irrigation operations in order to combat the mosquitoes that carried the disease in Syria, which led to an increase in the sand fly population which carries leishmaniasis, the rapid spread of which was also facilitated by the population growth and the establishment of residential areas characterized by bad environmental conditions. With regard to other endemic diseases, the efforts made to combat tuberculosis in Syria, as in other parts of the world, were highly successful in reducing the incidence of this disease which, however, subsequently reappeared for various reasons related to living conditions and the methods employed to combat the disease, particularly the unscientific remedial measures that led to an increase in the number of reported cases, some of which were resistant to treatment. Although many endemic diseases such as malaria, and epidemic diseases such as cholera, have been brought under control and some dangerous diseases affecting children, such as smallpox and infantile paralysis, have been eradicated, other endemic diseases such as Malta fever and typhoid have begun to replace them on the list of diseases to be combated as a matter of priority.

219. This change in the epidemiological map of endemic diseases led to a corresponding change in the administrative structures and programmes set up to monitor these diseases in order to reflect the new control priorities. New programmes have been introduced to combat recent epidemic diseases such as AIDS, as well as the endemic diseases such as diarrhoea and Malta fever which have begun to pose a health problem. Older programmes to control some of these diseases, such as the programme to combat parasitic diseases, particularly cutaneous leishmaniasis, and the programme to combat tuberculosis have been strengthened and restructured within the single primary health-care system in which all these programmes are combined. This system has been designed in such a way as to help local communities to monitor and report these diseases so that the various governmental and non-governmental sectors can take joint measures to combat them. The private sector is now playing a fundamental role in reporting these diseases and is participating fully and with a high degree of comprehension in the measures adopted to combat each disease. The support provided by the ancillary governmental health sectors, such as local administrative authorities and the bodies responsible for ensuring that water,

food and irrigation projects meet the requisite health standards, is also playing a major role in facilitating the control operations by helping to provide vehicles to transport workers assigned to spray pesticides in areas infested with disease-carrying insects, by planning irrigation projects that are not conducive to the future spread of malaria or bilharzia or by helping to change the environment in such a way as to prevent the spread of some of these diseases by breaking one of the weakest links in the chain of infection, as illustrated by the project to plant trees in some desert areas containing large numbers of saltwort plants which are used as food by animals hosting the leishmaniasis parasite. Financial and technical support is also being provided to combat diseases that affect both animals and humans, as illustrated by the national plan to combat Malta fever under which all herds and flocks of animals carrying this disease will be vaccinated within 10 years, thereby helping the Ministry of Health to control this disease among humans. All these endeavours are being supported, directly or indirectly, by the various information media and popular organizations, which are shedding light on the nature of these diseases and the individual and collective means to combat them, thereby indirectly helping to raise the level of public awareness.

220. The principal methods that are currently being applied to combat these diseases are as follows:

(a) Effective detection of infection by carrying out laboratory tests on suspected cases in and outside health institutions and wherever they are reported by the private sector;

(b) Collective preventive measures through immunization against some diseases for which vaccines exist or through distribution of the requisite preventive medicines;

(c) Monitoring of recorded and diagnosed cases of infection in order to ensure that each disease is fully treated in accordance with the specified procedures, and the administration of oral medication to combat some diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria and bilharzia;

(d) Use of modern prevention techniques, such as mosquito nets soaked in insecticide, in order to reduce the incidence of cutaneous leishmaniasis in some villages (rural Aleppo) in which this disease is endemic. Insecticide spraying operations are also carried out to kill larvae in areas infested with bilharzia, malaria and leishmaniasis in accordance with carefully prepared plans based on studies that have clearly shown that the insecticide used is harmless to humans and effective in combating the carriers of these diseases;

(e) Provision of prevention and control services, in keeping with the concept of primary health care and the prevalence of diseases in the various health areas, in such a way as to ensure that citizens who are infected or at risk have easy access to the requisite diagnostic and treatment services and, in particular, to preventive or curative medicine. These services are provided on an ongoing basis, without interruption;

(f) Establishment of a system of laboratories and laboratory equipment to support the monitoring and control endeavours at even the smallest health unit, with a central public health laboratory using the latest technology to diagnose these diseases and carry out the necessary analyses. These laboratories are equipped to collect blood and its derivatives in a hygienic

manner without any risk factor, all donated blood being thoroughly analyzed before it is used for purposes of transfusion;

(g) Modernization of the data-processing system for the monitoring, prevention and control of these diseases and the utilization of modern technologies for rapid reporting (by fax) and automation of the data analysis and planning systems.

221. However, it should be noted that the prevention and control of these diseases are being impeded by the following main obstacles:

(a) The high cost of the various forms of prevention and control methods used, which is straining the resources available for health support. This highlights the need to use local resources and mobilize local community capacities for purposes of prevention and control. There is also a need for fruitful collaboration at lower administrative levels with the other governmental sectors concerned with health (health partners);

(b) In spite of the highly developed scientific and technological methods used to combat these diseases, given the difficulty of finding reliable means of prevention such as vaccines or highly effective treatments there is always a possibility that these endemic and other diseases might spread or reappear. Accordingly, there is a need to apply prevention and control strategies and maintain the requisite structures on an ongoing basis.

222. The Government is providing preventive and therapeutic services in order to ensure medical care for all in the event of sickness through:

(a) Health education in order to stimulate awareness concerning the prevalent health problems and ways to overcome them;

(b) Environmental health and prevention and control of contagious and endemic diseases;

(c) Maternal and child health care and family planning;

(d) Treatment and relief for chronic diseases;

(e) Oral and dental hygiene;

(f) Provision of health services free of charge for all citizens at public health centres and hospitals.

223. In addition to the hospitals run by the Ministry of Health and other governmental bodies, health services are also provided by the private sector (clinics and hospitals). Contagious diseases are treated at all the governmental health centres and hospitals, at which health services are provided free of charge for all citizens, and also in the private sector. Non-contagious diseases, such as cardiovascular disorders and diabetes, are treated at the health centres and government hospitals and in the specialized clinics run by the public and private sectors. Cancers are treated at specialized centres and in the government hospitals.

224. A number of primary health-care programmes are being implemented in collaboration with international organizations with a view to reducing the

morbidity and mortality rates and improving health. These programmes are being implemented in accordance with the following principles:

(a) Area-specific health studies to identify priority problems;

(b) Making preventive health services accessible to all target categories;

(c) Provision of qualified health personnel, together with the requisite equipment and supplies;

(d) Provision of disease-specific treatment;

(e) Promotion of closer cooperation and coordination between the sectors concerned.

225. These programmes include:

(a) The national vaccination programm;

(b) The programme to combat diarrhoea;

(c) The programme to combat acute respiratory infections;

(d) The supplementary nutrition programme;

(e) The maternal care programme;

(f) The family planning programme;

(g) The programme to combat AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases;

(h) The programme to combat tuberculosis;

(i) The programme to combat ague, leishmaniasis and bilharzia;

(j) The care for the aged programme;

(k) Other related programmes.

226. Studies are also being conducted on the extent to which use is made of health services and their accessibility to persons living in the most remote areas.

227. The strategies adopted to prevent and treat prevalent diseases and illnesses have had the following results:

(a) Reduction of the crude mortality rate to 8.1 per 1,000 in 1994;

(b) Reduction of the infant mortality rate to 33 per 1,000 live births in 1994;

(c) Reduction of the maternal mortality rate to 97 per 100,000 live births in 1994;

(d) Reduction of the mortality rate among children under five years of age to 41.7 per thousand in 1994;

(e) Increase in average life expectancy at birth to 66 years in 1994;

(f) Improvement in the standard of nutrition, illustrated by the reduction in the proportion of underweight children below five years of age to 1.21 per thousand.

228. The morbidity and mortality rates have been reduced through the following measures:

(a) Preventive measures, including vaccines, nutritional supplements, insecticide spraying campaigns (leishmaniasis, malaria and bilharzia), disease-specific treatment and health education;

(b) Therapeutic measures, including provision of a sufficient number of specialized health personnel, appropriate treatments and services at the locality closest to the place of residence;

(c) Organizational measures, including the introduction of a health data system, the conduct of specific research and studies and monitoring and supervision of the services provided.

229. The basic support consists in the provision of sufficient qualified human resources, the supply of equipment, appliances and medicines, the supply and maintenance of the requisite vehicles and the provision of an efficient and rapid data-processing system.

230. The measures that are being considered with a view to updating the strategy of "health for all" in this field can be defined as follows:

(a) Provision of information through an integrated data-processing system;

(b) Satisfaction of needs (manpower, equipment and appliances for treatment, etc.) in accordance with their degree of priority.

Measures taken to maximize local community participation in the planning, implementation and control of primary health-care services

231. Until the mid-1980s, the Syrian Arab Republic pursued a policy of providing basic health services for citizens free of charge, without any direct or indirect support from the local community. However, following the adoption of the concept of primary health care as a basis for the health system, emphasis was placed on local initiatives to implement this concept. These initiatives were initially of a material nature, such as assistance in providing premises free of charge for these services or financial participation by the local community in order to ensure the staffing of the primary health-care centres. In the early 1970s, following a rapid assessment of the extent of local community participation in the provision of primary health-care services, the local community-based "healthy villages project" was inaugurated under which the community controls all aspects of the development process, including the health aspect, in its local environment. After the project had been implemented in

some Syrian villages, it was extended to all the country's governorates and came to be regarded as a local community-led development project that made maximum use of local capacities through an administrative structure of village development committees with specialized subcommittees such as committees for the advancement of women and health committees.

232. The members of these committees undertake studies to identify the priorities, as well as the difficulties that the community is facing, and the various subcommittees then formulate and implement plans to improve the community's situation, and particularly its health situation, either through direct services or through other basic services that target problem areas, such as water, sanitation and education, especially female education.

The role that international organizations are playing in upholding the right of children, women and other citizens to health

233. Although the Syrian Government has formulated plans to improve the health of the whole population, its health policies have focused on vulnerable categories such as children and women of childbearing age and intervention by international organizations in this field has taken the form of various types of support. In spite of the considerable reduction in the mortality rates among Syrian children under one and under five years of age, emphasis must continue to be placed on the need to ensure that children enjoy their right to health and, consequently, UNICEF and the World Health Organization are supporting a programme for children in the neediest areas which focuses on the protection of children from prevalent diseases which can be prevented through immunization, as well as measures to prevent cases of diarrhoea among children, which constituted the principal cause of child mortality 10 years ago. More recently, these organizations have supported activities to improve the nutritional situation of children suffering from iodine, iron or vitamin D deficiency or anaemia through collaboration between the governmental and private sectors.

234. The World Health Organization and the United Nations Population Fund are also supporting international activities to improve the reproductive and family health of men and women by promoting greater health awareness in this field, particularly among young persons before they form their family unit, by helping to improve maternity and other services at health centres, particularly in remote rural areas, by providing various family planning services on a larger scale with a view to promoting birth spacing in order to improve the health of both mothers and children, and by ensuring easier access to other special services in the field of reproductive health, such as the early detection of cancers of the reproductive system, particularly among women of childbearing age.

235. All the international organizations operating in the field of health are also providing technical and material assistance to improve the quality of the health services available to the population, particularly at the primary health-care level, now that these services have become widely accessible to the whole population. Endeavours are currently being made to enhance the performance of health personnel by focusing on the need to ensure that the beneficiaries are satisfied with the services, the need to improve the working conditions of health personnel in order to encourage them to upgrade the quality of the services, and the need to develop and improve the quality of the service-related

facilities and logistics in a manner consistent with the evolving health requirements of the population.

Articles 13 and 14

236. Article 37 of the Constitution stipulates that: "The right to education is guaranteed by the State. Education shall be free at all levels and compulsory at the primary level. The State shall endeavour to extend its compulsory nature to other levels and shall supervise and direct education in such a way as to make it consistent with the needs of society and production". Accordingly, education is a right enjoyed by every citizen of the country, without any distinction, and is free of charge from the primary level to the end of the university level. The State does not charge any fees for education.

Act No. 35

237. Article 2: All guardians of male and female Syrian children between the ages of 6 and 12 years have an obligation to ensure their enrolment at primary schools in the following manner:

(a) Children from 6 to 9 years of age shall enter primary school and shall continue their education to the end of the primary level, in accordance with the Ministry's directives, in the six statutory grades;

(b) Children from 10 to 12 years of age shall enter special classes attached to primary schools in which they shall follow the academic curricula and syllabuses prepared by the Ministry for that purpose. After completing the three-year primary level curricula and syllabuses, students shall be awarded a primary level completion certificate;

(c) The Ministry shall monitor the continued education of children in the compulsory education age group who are enrolled at its schools until they complete the primary level, even if they are over 12 years of age.

238. The Ministry of Education is endeavouring to combine the preparatory and primary schools in a single consolidated basic education level.

239. It is noteworthy that the construction of new local schools is planned on the basis of a study of the population size and the educational needs of each area in such a way as to ensure the full absorption of all the age groups. The locations of the schools are determined by the School Planning Department in each governorate.

240. In accordance with cultural agreements concluded with some friendly States, some special schools have been opened, such as the French schools at Damascus and Aleppo, the ICARDA (International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas) school, the Shell school, the European Commission school and the Iranian school.

241. The difficulties impeding the national plan of action to absorb all the primary school age groups after the promulgation of the Eradication of Illiteracy Act No. 7 of 1972 have been tackled in the following manner:

Combined classes

242. Pursuant to the provisions of the Compulsory Education Act and its implementing directives, primary schools were established in all populated localities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, even in the smallest localities in remote or desert areas. Depending on the number of students, these schools are staffed by one to five teachers chosen on the basis of their competence.

The mobile school experiment

243. These schools were established, pursuant to the provisions of the Compulsory Education Act, for the children of nomadic herders. The requisite measures are taken to prepare a special syllabus, within the basic education syllabus, which meets the aspirations of these nomadic children in a manner consistent with their environment. The school consists of a classroom large enough to accommodate 45 male and female students, together with living quarters for the teacher, utilities and services, all of which are in a caravan that can be towed by an agricultural tractor or other vehicle wherever the nomadic students desire.

The supplementary classes experiment

244. This experiment was carried out, on a trial basis and in governorates that are self-sufficient in teachers, with a view to overcoming the academic shortcomings of students and, consequently, avoiding the examination failures which are one of the main causes of drop-outs. The teachers of these classes are chosen for their competence and are allowed full scope, under the supervision of the local or central educational counsellor, to modify the syllabus. These teachers are required to undertake a comprehensive study of each student in order to identify the causes of his or her academic shortcomings.

245. There has been a decline in external international assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic in recent years. UNICEF is providing limited assistance in view of its constantly diminishing resources, as a result of which the programme objectives have been modified in accordance with their respective priorities. The mid-term review report on the Syrian Arab Republic/UNESCO cooperation programmes for the period 1996-2000 has been published and discussed in the presence of representatives of all the government departments concerned. Although most of these programmes were successful, particularly in regard to the promotion of greater public awareness and the development of teaching skills, further technical assistance is still required in order to cater for the welfare of children, particularly in areas with special needs.

246. The educational ladder in the Syrian Arab Republic is as follows:

<table>
<tr><td>Age</td><td colspan="3"></td><td>Years of study</td></tr>
<tr><td>23</td><td></td><td rowspan="6">Higher education</td><td></td><td>21</td></tr>
<tr><td>22</td><td></td><td></td><td>20</td></tr>
<tr><td>21</td><td></td><td></td><td>19</td></tr>
<tr><td>20</td><td></td><td>University education</td><td>18</td></tr>
<tr><td>19</td><td>Intermediate colleges</td><td></td><td>17</td></tr>
<tr><td>18
17</td><td></td><td></td><td>16
15</td></tr>
<tr><td>16</td><td>Vocational education</td><td>Technical secondary</td><td>General secondary</td><td>14</td></tr>
<tr><td>15</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>13</td></tr>
<tr><td>14
13</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Preparatory level</td><td>12
11</td></tr>
<tr><td>12</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>10</td></tr>
<tr><td>11</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="6">Primary level</td><td>9</td></tr>
<tr><td>10</td><td>8</td></tr>
<tr><td>9</td><td>7</td></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td>6</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td>5</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td>4</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="3">Pre-school education
Kindergartens: voluntary and fee-paying</td><td>3</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>2</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>1</td></tr>
</table>

Distribution of Ministry of Education schools
in the academic year 1996/97

	General	%	Special	%	UNRWA schools	%	Total	%
Primary level	10 537	97.7	159	1.5	87	0.8	10 783	100
Preparatory level	2 472	95.5	67	2.6	48	1.9	2 587	100
General secondary	892	93.4	63	6.6	-	-	955	100
Industrial level	240	100	-	-	-	-	240	100
Female secondary	355	100	-	-	-	-	355	100
Technical/commercial/ vocational	86	100	-	-	-	-	86	100

Article 15

247. Article 35 of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, promulgated in Decree No. 208 of 13 March 1973, stipulates that (i) freedom of belief shall be safeguarded and the State shall respect all religions; (ii) the State guarantees freedom to engage in all religious observances.

248. Under the terms of article 38, every citizen has the right to freely and openly express his opinion orally, in writing or through any other means of expression and the State guarantees freedom of the press, printing and publication.

249. With a view to ensuring that all citizens enjoy their right to participate extensively in cultural life, the Ministry of Culture was established to exercise the following functions:

(a) To make knowledge and culture accessible to the public at large and to promote and propagate the message of Arab civilization and provide all the facilities needed for its interaction with other major world civilizations;

(b) To provide the people with sound national guidance with a view to developing their national awareness, helping them to improve their social and cultural standards, strengthening their morale and their sense of responsibility and encouraging them to cooperate, make sacrifices and intensify their efforts to serve their country and mankind;

(c) To make popular culture available to the masses, diversify its methods, broaden its scope and enrich it with the latest discoveries so that the largest possible number of citizens can benefit therefrom;

(d) To establish contact with foreign cultural and artistic institutions with a view to benefiting from their activities and inviting leading cultural and intellectual personalities throughout the world to visit Syria and deliver lectures;

(e) To apply the provisions of the cultural agreements concluded with foreign Governments;

(f) To organize cultural and artistic exhibitions, fairs and festivals, hold conferences, organize competitions, award prizes, promote the establishment of various cultural associations, monitor their activities and help them to discharge their tasks;

(g) To revive and disseminate the time-honoured Arab scientific and literary heritage and conduct research into Arabic lexicography with a view to its preservation and the inclusion therein of modern scientific and technical terminology;

(h) To uncover Syria's archaeological and historical heritage and gather, preserve and protect all its constituent elements for future generations;

(i) To establish archaeological, historical, artistic and folklore museums and help to organize museums run by other government ministries;

(j) To encourage and reinvigorate literature and the arts, direct them in the manner required by the interests of the State, safeguard their future, ensure the livelihood and welfare of their professional practitioners, develop and promote folklore and popular literature and gather all the information available thereon.

250. In order to implement the policies aimed at encouraging popular participation in the cultural field, more than 300 Arab cultural centres have been established and are operating under the Ministry's supervision in all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. Some of these centres resemble cultural palaces in view of their impressive architectural design and size and the variety of services that they offer. These services include:

(a) Access to books and periodicals to enable readers to keep abreast of contemporary developments;

(b) Organization of cinematographic, theatrical and musical performances;

(c) Provision of free services for citizens in order to enable them to acquire skills and crafts at popular cultural institutes and centres for the fine and applied arts where students are taught computer science, electronics, tailoring and dressmaking, health education, music and foreign languages.

251. The Ministry of Culture has established institutions and departments to help to promote the cultural movement in the country and enable citizens to exercise their right to take part in cultural life. The following institutions and departments enjoy administrative and financial autonomy and have their own statutes:

(a) The Directorate-General of Archaeology and Museums, which was established under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 88 of 1947 to exercise the following functions:

(i) To uncover and gather all the constituent elements of the country's archaeological heritage in order to maintain and protect them for future generations;
(ii) To establish archaeological and folklore museums;
(iii) To organize archaeological exhibitions in and outside the country.

(b) The Public Cinematographic Authority, which was established under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 258 of 12 November 1963 to promote the film industry in the Syrian Arab Republic in such a way as to serve culture and learning, present national and social causes in an artistically and intellectually progressive way and support cinematographic production in the country. It imports cinematographic films for distribution among cinemas with a view to improving the technical standard of their films. It has also produced instructive cinematographic films (40 feature films and 300 short films). In addition, the Authority promotes and disseminates cinematographic culture by celebrating cinema weeks in and outside the country and publishing the "Cinema Life" magazine and a series of books on the cinema. Its Al-Kindi cinema halls project has been extended to all the country's cities and many of the Authority's films have been awarded major prizes at Arab and foreign festivals (Carthage, Moscow, etc.);

(c) The Academy of Dramatic Arts, which was established under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 8 of 28 April 1977 to train specialists in the various branches of the dramatic arts with a view to promoting Arabic-language theatrical productions. The Academy's graduates are awarded a diploma in drama and theatrical criticism after a minimum of four years' study following completion of their secondary education;

(d) The Academy of Music, which was established under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 29 of 4 November 1990 to promote Arab and international music in the Syrian Arab Republic by training a generation of graduate instrumentalists, composers and conductors with a highly refined artistic culture. It uses modern methods to teach the principles of Arab and international solo and choral vocal music and trains researchers in Arab and international music;

(e) The Al-Assad Library, which was established under the terms of Legislative Decree No. 17 of 26 July 1983 for the following purposes:

(i) To assemble, preserve, protect and document the national cultural heritage in a modern and efficient manner in order to facilitate its use as a source of reference for researchers;
(ii) To restore historical manuscripts and documents by the most effective modern methods in order to preserve them so that researchers can use them as a source of reference;
(iii) To compile printed catalogues of the printed and manuscript components of the national cultural heritage;
(iv) To organize lectures, symposia, cultural and artistic festivals, exhibitions of national and foreign books and exhibitions of modern art;
(v) To make available, and facilitate the use of, all branches and fields of knowledge through books, publications and other sources and carriers of information;
(vi) To procure various types of books and publications in Arabic and foreign languages and place them at the disposal of readers;
(vii) To organize training courses for library staff;
(viii) To provide documentation, reference and information services.

252. In accordance with the policies designed to encourage popular participation in the field of culture and the arts, the Ministry has established two academies of music at Damascus and Aleppo to which talented children from 6 to 12 years of age are admitted. It has also established 13 fine arts centres, 2 applied arts centres and 2 intermediate colleges for applied arts and archaeology.

253. The Ministry of Higher Education offers higher education to anyone whose academic qualifications entitle him to attend an intermediate college or university in keeping with the principle of the democratic nature of education which has been advocated by President Hafez al-Assad. The Ministry also ensures the dissemination of information on all aspects of scientific progress by supplying, at nominal prices, university textbooks that contain up-to-date accurate scientific information. Further information on the research conducted by the members of university teaching staffs is disseminated through the publication of their scientific periodicals. Damascus University publishes nine scholarly scientific magazines, while the Tishrin and Baath Universities publish two magazines each. For its part, the Ministry of Higher Education has

so far published three scholarly scientific magazines: the Basil al-Assad Engineering Sciences Magazine, the Basil al-Assad Agricultural Engineering Sciences Magazine and the Basil al-Assad Linguistic and Literary Sciences Magazine. The Ministry has also published 18 volumes containing summaries of doctoral theses on the basis of which their authors were awarded doctorates and appointed as members of university teaching staffs. The Ministry has published an index containing the titles of the research papers for which the universities awarded master's degrees and doctorates from 1990 to 1995 and is currently updating this index for the years 1996 and 1997. Summaries of these research papers are being entered into the computer in order to constitute a database accessible to other researchers.

254. In accordance with article 12 of the Universities Regulatory Act of 1975, the aim of the Syrian universities is to promote progress in science, technology, art and intellectual fields, achieve Arab goals, disseminate and develop Arab civilization, enrich human culture, expand the horizons of human knowledge and contribute to socio-economic development.

255. Scientific and technical progress is never used for purposes that are incompatible with the enjoyment of any human rights, including every individual's right to life, health, liberty of person and privacy. On the contrary, full support and encouragement is given to every materially and mentally creative innovator through the organization of annual specialized exhibitions for this purpose.

256. The Ministry of Higher Education awards an annual prize (the Basil al-Assad Scientific Research Prize) for the best research paper written by a member of a university's teaching staff. This prize comprises a financial reward, a certificate of merit and a gold medal. The Ministry's Higher Council for the Sciences also awards an annual prize for the best research paper submitted as part of the activities organized during Science Week, which is held every year at one of Syria's four universities.

257. Legislative Decree No. 47 of 1946, as amended by Act No. 28 of 1980, regulates and protects commercial and industrial property and specifies the procedures and regulations for the issue of patents, protection of intellectual property rights and copyright. Steps are currently being taken to promulgate a Copyright Act incorporating all the provisions needed to protect and safeguard intellectual property rights.

258. The Syrian Arab Constitution promulgated in Decree No. 208 of 1973 guarantees the right to education. Article 37 of the Act stipulates that: "The right to education is guaranteed by the State. Education shall be free at all levels and compulsory at the primary level. The State shall endeavour to extend its compulsory nature to other levels and shall supervise and direct education in such a way as to make it consistent with the needs of society and production." Accordingly, in the Syrian Arab Republic all levels and types of education (including higher education) are available to all citizens.

259. With regard to respect for, and protection of, freedom of scientific research and creative activity, enjoyment of this freedom is guaranteed by the manner in which all the Ministries and scientific and professional institutions and federations encourage the organization of scientific symposia, conferences and workshops at which all the participating scientists freely exchange expertise and experiences without any hindrance or restrictions.

260. The higher education system in the Syrian Arab Republic attaches great importance to scientific and cultural relations, within the context of Arab, regional and international cooperation, in keeping with the laws and regulations governing this system, such as the Universities Regulatory Act of 1975, the Scientific Missions Act of 1970 and the decisions taken by the Higher Education Council. The Ministry of Higher Education has concluded a large number of cultural and scientific cooperation agreements with universities and higher educational institutions in the Arab World and in friendly foreign States. These include cultural agreements and joint scientific activities with universities in Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Republic of Egypt. Fifteen such cultural agreements have been concluded, in addition to 51 agreements under which Syrian universities have been twinned with sister Arab institutions. The Syrian universities are also collaborating with the Federation of Arab Universities, the Federation of Arab Scientific Research Councils, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development and the Arab Centre for Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD).

261. Syria enjoys numerous forms of cultural and scientific cooperation with various foreign States under the terms of 38 cultural agreements, each of which is implemented through a programme that is renewed every three years. The Syrian universities have also been twinned, through agreements, with 148 foreign universities and bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding and exchange visit protocols have been signed to further strengthen this scientific cooperation.

262. The Syrian Arab Republic participates in the activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) for the development of educational and scientific syllabuses in foreign countries. It is also cooperating in the scientific activities organized by the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS), the International Centre for Theoretical Physics at Trieste (Italy), the COMSATS Commission and the Science and Technology Centre of the Non-Aligned Countries.